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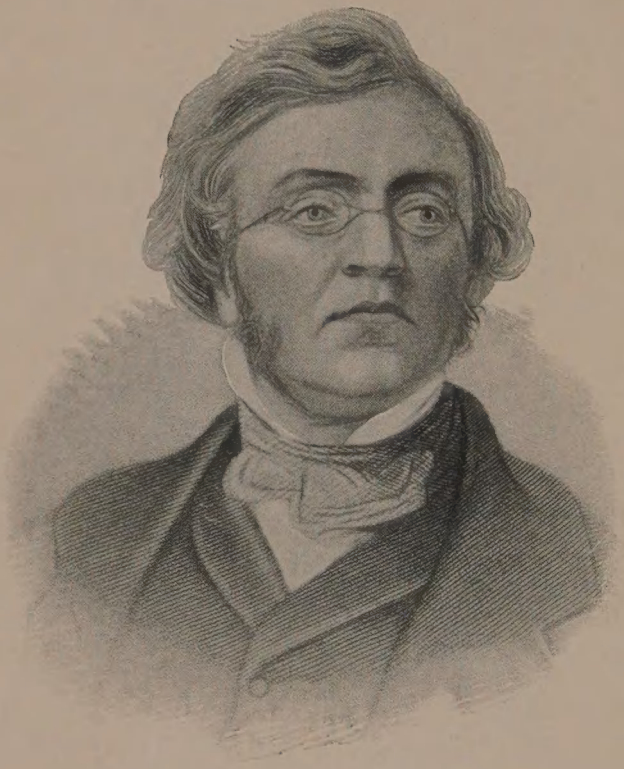

W. M. THACKERAY

Morley's English Men of Letters

WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY

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Library Edition

New York:
THE PUBLISHERS PLATE RENTING CO.

THACKERAY.

CHAPTER I.

BIOGRAPHICAL.

In the foregoing volumes of this series of *English Men of Letters*, and in other works of a similar nature which have appeared lately as to the *Ancient Classics* and *Foreign Classics*, biography has naturally been, if not the leading, at any rate a considerable element. The desire is common to all readers to know not only what a great writer has written, but also of what nature has been the man who has produced such great work. As to all the authors taken in hand before, there has been extant some written record of the man's life. Biographical details have been more or less known to the world, so that, whether of a Cicero, or of a Goethe, or of our own Johnson, there has been a story to tell. Of Thackeray no life has been written; and though they who knew him—and possibly many who did not—are conversant with anecdotes of the man, who was one so well known in society as to have created many anecdotes, yet there has been no memoir of his life sufficient to supply the wants of even so small a work as this purports to be. For this the reason may simply be told. Thackeray, not long before his death, had had his taste offended by some fulsome biography. Paragraphs, of which the eulogy seemed to have been the produce rather of personal love than of inquiry or judgment, disgusted him, and he begged of his girls that when he should have gone there should nothing of the sort be done with his name.

We can imagine how his mind had worked, how he had declared to himself that, as by those loving hands into which his letters, his notes, his little details—his literary remains, as such documents used to be called—might naturally fall, truth of his foibles and of his shortcomings could not be told, so should not his praises be written, or that flattering portrait be limned which biographers are wont to produce. Acting upon these instructions, his daughters—while there were two living, and since that the one surviving—have carried out the order which has appeared to them to be sacred. Such being the case, it certainly is not my purpose now to write what may be called a life of Thackeray. In this preliminary chapter

I will give such incidents and anecdotes of his life as will tell the reader perhaps all about him that a reader is entitled to ask. I will tell how he became an author, and will say how first he worked and struggled, and then how he worked and prospered, and became a household word in English literature; how, in this way, he passed through that course of mingled failure and success which, though the literary aspirant may suffer, is probably better both for the writer and for the writings than unclouded early glory. The suffering, no doubt, is acute, and a touch of melancholy, perhaps of indignation, may be given to words which have been written while the heart has been too full of its own wrongs; but this is better than the continued note of triumph, which is still heard in the final voices of the spoilt child of literature, even when they are losing their music. Then I will tell how Thackeray died, early indeed, but still having done a good life's work. Something of his manner, something of his appearance I can say, something perhaps of his condition of mind; because for some years he was known to me. But of the continual intercourse of himself with the world, and of himself with his own works, I can tell little, because no record of his life has been made public.

William Makepeace Thackeray was born at Calcutta, on July 18, 1811. His father was Richmond Thackeray, son of W. M. Thackeray of Hadley, near Barnet, in Middlesex. A relation of his, of the same name, a Rev. Mr. Thackeray, I knew well as rector of Hadley, many years afterwards. Him I believe to have been a second cousin of our Thackeray, but I think they had never met each other. Another cousin was Provost of Kings at Cambridge, fifty years ago, as Cambridge men will remember. Clergymen of the family have been numerous in England during the century; and there was one, a Rev. Elias Thackeray, whom I also knew in my youth, a dignitary, if I remember right, in the diocese of Meath. The Thackerays seem to have affected the Church; but such was not at any period of his life the bias of our novelist's mind.

His father and grandfather were Indian civil servants. His mother was Anne Becher, whose father was also in the Company's service. She married early in India, and was only nineteen when her son was born. She was left a widow in 1816, with only one child, and was married a few years afterwards to Major Henry Carmichael Smyth, with whom Thackeray lived on terms of affectionate intercourse till the major died. All who knew William Makepeace remember his mother well, a handsome, spare, gray-haired lady, whom Thackeray treated with a courtly deference as well as constant affection. There was, however, something of discrepancy between them as to matters of religion. Mrs. Carmichael Smyth was disposed to the somewhat austere observance of the evangelical section of the Church. Such, certainly, never became the case with her son. There was disagreement on the subject, and probably unhappiness at intervals, but never, I think quarrelling. Thackeray's house was his mother's home whenever she pleased it, and the home also of his stepfather.

He was brought a child from India, and was sent early to the Charter House. Of his life and doings there his friend and schoolfellow George Venables writes to me as follows:

"My recollection of him, though fresh enough, does not furnish much material for biography. He came to school young—a pretty, gentle, and rather timid boy. I think his experience there was not generally pleasant. Though he had afterwards a scholarlike knowledge of Latin, he did not attain distinction in the school; and I should think that the character of the head-master, Dr. Russel, which was vigorous, unsympathetic, and stern, though not severe, was uncongenial to his own. With the boys who knew him, Thackeray was popular; but he had no skill in games, and, I think, no taste for them. . . . He was already known by his faculty of making verses, chiefly parodies. I only remember one line of one parody on a poem of L. E. L.'s, about 'Violets, dark blue violets;' Thackeray's version was 'Cabbages, bright green cabbages,' and we thought it very witty. He took part in a scheme, which came to nothing, for a school magazine, and he wrote verses for it, of which I only remember that they were good of their kind. When I knew him better, in later years, I thought I could recognize the sensitive nature which he had as a boy. . . . His change of retrospective feeling about his school days was very characteristic. In his earlier books he always spoke of the Charter House as Slaughter House and Smithfield. As he became famous and prosperous his memory softened, and Slaughter House was changed into Grey Friars, where Colonel Newcome ended his life."

In February, 1829, when he was not as yet eighteen, Thackeray went up to Trinity College, Cambridge, and was, I think, removed in 1830. It may be presumed, therefore, that his studies there were not very serviceable to him. There are few, if any, records left of his doings at the university—unless it be the fact that he did there commence the literary work of his life. The line about the cabbages, and the scheme of the school magazine, can hardly be said to have amounted even to a commencement. In 1829 a little periodical was brought out at Cambridge, called *The Snob*, with an assurance on the title that it was *not* conducted by members of the university. It is presumed that Thackeray took a hand in editing this. He certainly wrote, and published in the little paper, some burlesque lines on the subject which was given for the Chancellor's prize poem of the year. This was *Timbuctoo*, and Tennyson was the victor on the occasion. There is some good fun in the four first and four last lines of Thackeray's production.

In Africa—a quarter of the world—
Men's skins are black; their hair is crisped and curled;
And somewhere there, unknown to public view,
A mighty city lies, called Timbuctoo.

* * * * * * *

I see her tribes the hill of glory mount,
And sell their sugars on their own account;
While round her throne the prostrate nations come,
Sue for her rice, and barter for her rum.

I cannot find in *The Snob* internal evidence of much literary merit beyond this. But then how many great writers have there been from whose early lucubrations no future literary excellence could be prognosticated?

There is something at any rate in the name of the publication which tells of work that did come. Thackeray's mind was at all times peculiarly exercised with a sense of snobbishness. His appreciation of the vice grew abnormally, so that at last he had a morbid horror of a snob—a morbid fear lest this or the other man should turn snob on his hands. It is probable that the idea was taken from the early *Snob* at Cambridge, either from his own participation in the work or from his remembrance of it. *The Snob* lived, I think, but nine weeks, and was followed at an interval, in 1830, by *The Gownsman*, which lived to the seventeenth number, and at the opening of which Thackeray no doubt had a hand. It professed to be a continuation of *The Snob*. It contains a dedication to all proctors, which I should not be sorry to attribute to him. "To all Proctors, past, present, and future—

Whose taste it is our privilege to follow,
Whose virtue it is our duty to imitate,
Whose presence it is our interest to avoid."

There is, however, nothing beyond fancy to induce me to believe that Thackeray was the author of the dedication, and I do not know that there is any evidence to show that he was connected with *The Snob* beyond the writing of *Timbuctoo*.

In 1830 he left Cambridge, and went to Weimar either in that year or in 1831. Between Weimar and Paris he spent some portion of his earlier years, while his family—his mother, that is, and his stepfather—were living in Devonshire. It was then the purport of his life to become an artist, and he studied drawing at Paris, affecting especially Bonnington, the young English artist who had himself painted at Paris, and who had died in 1828. He never learned to draw—perhaps never could have learned. That he was idle, and did not do his best, we may take for granted. He was always idle, and only on some occasions, when the spirit moved him thoroughly, did he do his best even in after-life. But with drawing—or rather without it—he did wonderfully well even when he did his worst. He did illustrate his own books, and everyone knows how incorrect were his delineations. But as illustrations they were excellent. How often have I wished that characters of my own creating might be sketched as faultily, if with the same appreciation of the intended purpose. Let anyone look at the "plates," as they are called in *Vanity Fair*, and compare each with the scenes and the characters intended to be displayed, and

there see whether the artist—if we may call him so—has not managed to convey in the picture the exact feeling which he has described in the text. I have a little sketch of his, in which a cannon-ball is supposed to have just carried off the head of an aide-de-camp—messenger I had perhaps better say, lest I might affront military feelings—who is kneeling on the field of battle and delivering a despatch to Marlborough on horseback. The graceful ease with which the duke receives the message though the messenger's head be gone, and the soldier-like precision with which the headless hero finishes his last effort of military obedience, may not have been portrayed with well-drawn figures, but no finished illustration ever told its story better. Dickens has informed us that he first met Thackeray in 1835, on which occasion the young artist aspirant, looking no doubt after profitable employment, "proposed to become the illustrator of my earliest book." It is singular that such should have been the first interview between the two great novelists. We may presume that the offer was rejected.

In 1832, Thackeray came of age, and inherited his fortune—as to which various stories have been told. It seems to have amounted to about five hundred a year, and to have passed through his hands in a year or two, interest and principal. It has been told of him that it was all taken away from him at cards, but such was not the truth. Some went in an Indian bank in which he invested it. A portion was lost at cards. But with some of it—the larger part, as I think—he endeavoured, in concert with his stepfather, to float a newspaper, which failed. There seem to have been two newspapers in which he was so concerned, *The National Standard* and *The Constitutional*. On the latter he was engaged with his stepfather, and in carrying that on he lost the last of his money. *The National Standard* had been running for some weeks when Thackeray joined it, and lost his money in it. It ran only for little more than twelve months, and then, the money having gone, the periodical came to an end. I know no road to fortune more tempting to a young man, or one that with more certainty leads to ruin. Thackeray, who in a way more or less correct, often refers in his writings, if not to the incidents, at any rate to the remembrances of his own life, tells us much of the story of this newspaper in *Lovel the Widower*. "They are welcome," says the bachelor, "to make merry at my charges in respect of a certain bargain which I made on coming to London, and in which, had I been Moses Primrose purchasing green spectacles, I could scarcely have been more taken in. My Jenkinson was an old college acquaintance, whom I was idiot enough to imagine a respectable man. The fellow had a very smooth tongue and sleek sanctified exterior. He was rather a popular preacher, and used to cry a good deal in the pulpit. He and a queer wine-merchant and bill discounter, Sherrick by name, had somehow got possession of that neat little literary paper, *The Museum*, which perhaps you remember, and this eligible literary property my friend Honeyman, with his wheedling tongue, induced me to purchase." Here is the history of Thackeray's money, told

by himself plainly enough, but with no intention on his part of narrating an incident in his own life to the public. But the drollery of the circumstances, his own mingled folly and young ambition, struck him as being worth narration, and the more forcibly as he remembered all the ins and outs of his own reflections at the time—how he had meant to enchant the world, and make his fortune. There was literary capital in it of which he could make use after so many years. Then he tells us of this ambition, and of the folly of it; and at the same time puts forward the excuses to be made for it. "I daresay I gave myself airs as editor of that confounded *Museum*, and proposed to educate the public taste, to diffuse morality and sound literature throughout the nation, and to pocket a liberal salary in return for my services. I daresay I printed my own sonnets, my own tragedy, my own verses. . . . I daresay I wrote satirical articles. . . . I daresay I made a gaby of myself to the world. Pray, my good friend, hast thou never done likewise? If thou hast never been a fool, be sure thou wilt never be a wise man." Thackeray was quite aware of his early weaknesses, and in the maturity of life knew well that he had not been precociously wise. He delighted so to tell his friends, and he delighted also to tell the public, not meaning that any but an inner circle should know that he was speaking of himself. But the story now is plain to all who can read.*

It was thus that he lost his money; and then, not having prospered very well with his drawing lessons in Paris or elsewhere, he was fain to take up literature as a profession. It is a business which has its allurements. It requires no capital, no special education, no training, and may be taken up at any time without a moment's delay. If a man can command a table, a chair, a pen, paper, and ink, he can commence his trade as literary man. It is thus that aspirants generally do commence it. A man may or may not have another employment to back him, or means of his own; or—as was the case with Thackeray, when, after his first misadventure, he had to look about him for the means of living—he may have nothing but his intellect and his friends. But the idea comes to the man that as he has the pen and ink, and time on his hand, why should he not write and make money?

It is an idea that comes to very many men and women, old as well as young—to many thousands who at last are crushed by it, of whom the world knows nothing. A man can make the attempt though he has not a coat fit to go out into the street with; or a woman, though she be almost in rags. There is no apprenticeship wanted. Indeed, there is no room for such apprenticeship. It is an art which no one teaches; there is no professor who, in a dozen lessons, even pretends to show the aspirant how to write a book or an article. If you would be a watchmaker, you must learn;

* The report that he had lost all his money and was going to live by painting in Paris, was still prevalent in London in 1836. Macready, on the 27th April of that year, says in his *Diary*: "At Garrick Club, where I dined and saw the papers. Met Thackeray, who has spent all his fortune, and is now about to settle in Paris, I believe as an artist." But at this time he was, in truth, turning to literature as a profession.

or a lawyer, a cook, or even a housemaid. Before you can clean a horse you must go into the stable, and begin at the beginning. Even the cab-driving tiro must sit for awhile on the box, and learn something of the streets, before he can ply for a fare. But the literary beginner rushes at once at the top rung of his ladder—as though a youth, having made up his mind to be a clergyman, should demand without preliminary steps, to be appointed Bishop of London. That he should be able to read and write is presumed, and that only. So much may be presumed of everyone, and nothing more is wanted.

In truth nothing more is wanted—except those inner lights as to which so many men live and die without having learned whether they possess them or not. Practice, industry, study of literature, cultivation of taste, and the rest, will of course lend their aid, will probably be necessary before high excellence is attained. But the instances are not to seek—are at the fingers of us all—in which the first uninstructed effort has succeeded. A boy, almost, or perhaps an old woman, has sat down and the book has come, and the world has read it, and the booksellers have been civil and have written their cheques. When all trades, all professions, all seats at offices, all employments at which a crust can be earned, are so crowded that a young man knows not where to look for the means of livelihood, is there not an attraction in this which to the self confident must be almost invincible? The booksellers are courteous and write their cheques, but that is not half the whole? *Monstrari digito!* That is obtained. The happy aspirant is written of in newspapers, or, perhaps, better still, he writes of others. When the barrister of forty-five has hardly got a name beyond Chancery Lane, this glorious young scribe, with the first down on his lips, has printed his novel and been talked about.

The temptation is irresistible, and thousands fall into it. How is a man to know that he is not the lucky one or the gifted one? There is the table, and there the pen and ink. Among the unfortunate, he who fails altogether and from the first start is not the most unfortunate. A short period of life is wasted, and a sharp pang is endured. Then the disappointed one is relegated to the condition of life which he would otherwise have filled a little earlier. He has been wounded, but not killed, or even maimed. But he who has a little success, who succeeds in earning a few halcyon, but ah! so dangerous guineas, is drawn into a trade from which he will hardly escape till he be driven from it, if he come out alive, by sheer hunger. He hangs on till the guineas become crowns and shillings—till some sad record of his life, made when he applies for charity, declares that he has worked hard for the last year or two, and has earned less than a policeman in the streets or a porter at a railway. It is to that that he is brought by applying himself to a business which requires only a table and chair, with pen, ink, and paper! It is to that which he is brought by venturing to believe that he has been gifted with powers of imagination, creation, and expression.

The young man who makes the attempt knows that he must run the chance. He is well aware that nine must fail where one will make his running good. So much as that does reach his ears and recommends itself to his common-sense. But why should it not be he as well as another? There is always some lucky one winning the prize. And this prize when it has been won is so well worth the winning! He can endure starvation—so he tells himself—as well as another. He will try. But yet he knows that he has but one chance out of ten in his favour, and it is only in his happier moments that he flatters himself that that remains to him. Then there falls upon him—in the midst of that labour which for its success especially requires that a man's heart shall be light, and that he be always at his best—doubt and despair. If there be no chance, of what use is his labor?

> Were it not better done as others use,
> To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,

and amuse himself after that fashion? Thus the very industry which alone could give him a chance is discarded. It is so that the young man feels who, with some slight belief in himself and with many doubts, sits down to commence the literary labor by which he hopes to live.

So it was, no doubt, with Thackeray. Such were his hopes and his fears—with a resolution of which we can well understand that it should have waned at times, of earning his bread, if he did not make his fortune, in the world of literature. One has not to look far for evidence of the condition I have described—that it was so, Amaryllis and all. How or when he made his very first attempt in London, I have not learned; but he had not probably spent his money without forming "press" acquaintances, and had thus formed an aperture for the thin end of the wedge. He wrote for *The Constitutional*, of which he was part proprietor, beginning his work for that paper as a correspondent from Paris. For awhile he was connected with *The Times* newspaper, though his work there did not, I think, amount to much. His first regular employment was on *Fraser's Magazine*, when Mr. Fraser's shop was in Regent Street, when Oliver Yorke was the presumed editor, and among contributors, Carlyle was one of the most notable. I imagine that the battle of life was difficult enough with him even after he had become one of the leading props of that magazine. All that he wrote was not taken, and all that was taken was not approved. In 1837-38, the *History of Samuel Titmarsh and the Great Hoggarty Diamond* appeared in the magazine. The *Great Hoggarty Diamond* is now known to all readers of Thackeray's works. It is not my purpose to speak specially of it here, except to assert that it has been thought to be a great success. When it was being brought out, the author told a friend of his—and of mine—that it was not much thought of at Fraser's, and that he had been called upon to shorten it. That is an incident disagree

able in its nature to any literary gentleman, and likely to be specially so when he knows that his provision of bread, certainly of improved bread and butter, is at stake. The man who thus darkens his literary brow with the frown of disapproval, has at his disposal all the loaves and all the fishes that are going. If the writer be successful, there will come a time when he will be above such frowns; but, when that opinion went forth, Thackeray had not yet made his footing good, and the notice to him respecting it must have been very bitter. It was in writing this *Hoggarty Diamond* that Thackeray first invented the name of Michael Angelo Titmarsh. Samuel Titmarsh was the writer, whereas Michael Angelo was an intending illustrator. Thackeray's nose had been broken in a school fight, while he was quite a little boy, by another little boy, at the Charter House; and there was probably some association intended to be jocose with the name of the great artist, whose nose was broken by his fellow-student Torrigiano, and who, as it happened, died exactly three centuries before Thackeray.

I can understand all the disquietude of his heart when that warning, as to the too great length of his story, was given to him. He was not a man capable of feeling at any time quite assured in his position, and when that occurred he was very far from assurance. I think that at no time did he doubt the sufficiency of his own mental qualification for the work he had taken in hand; but he doubted all else. He doubted the appreciation of the world; he doubted his fitness for turning his intellect to valuable account; he doubted his physical capacity—dreading his own lack of industry; he doubted his luck; he doubted the continual absence of some of those misfortunes on which the works of literary men are shipwrecked. Though he was aware of his own power, he always, to the last, was afraid that his own deficiences should be too strong against him. It was his nature to be idle—to put off his work—and then to be angry with himself for putting it off. Ginger was hot in the mouth with him, and all the allurements of the world were strong upon him. To find on Monday morning an excuse why he should not on Monday do Monday's work was, at the time, an inexpressible relief to him, but had become a deep regret—almost a remorse—before the Monday was over. To such a one it was not given to believe in himself with that sturdy rock-bound foundation which we see to have belonged to some men from the earliest struggles of their career. To him, then, must have come an inexpressible pang when he was told that his story must be curtailed.

Who else would have told such a story of himself to the first acquaintance he chanced to meet? Of Thackeray it might be predicted that he certainly would do so. No little would of the kind ever came to him but what he disclosed it at once. "They have only bought so many of my new book." "Have you seen the abuse of my last number?" "What am I to turn my hand to? They are getting tired of my novels." "They don't read it," he said to me of *Esmond*. "So you don't mean to publish my

work?" he said once to a publisher in an open company. Other men keep their little troubles to themselves. I have heard even of authors who have declared how all the publishers were running after their books; I have heard some discourse freely of their fourth and fifth editions; I have known an author to boast of his thousands sold in this country, and his tens of thousands in America; but I never heard anyone else declare that no one would read his *chef-d'œuvre*, and that the world was becoming tired of him. It was he who said, when he was fifty, that a man past fifty should never write a novel.

And yet, as I have said, he was from an early age fully conscious of his own ability. That he was so is to be seen in the handling of many of his early works—in *Barry Lyndon*, for instance, and the *Memoirs of Mr. C. James Yellowplush*. The sound is too certain for doubt of that kind. But he had not then, nor did he ever achieve that assurance of public favour which makes a man confident that his work will be successful. During the years of which we are now speaking Thackeray was a literary Bohemian in this sense—that he never regarded his own status as certain. While performing much of the best of his life's work he was not sure of his market, not certain of his readers, his publishers, or his price; nor was he certain of himself.

It is impossible not to form some contrast between him and Dickens as to this period of his life—a comparison not as to their literary merits, but literary position. Dickens was one year his junior in age, and at this time, viz., 1837–38, had reached almost the zenith of his reputation. *Pickwick* had been published, and *Oliver Twist* and *Nicholas Nickleby* were being published. All the world was talking about the young author who was assuming his position with a confidence in his own powers which was fully justified both by his present and future success. It was manifest that he could make not only his own fortune, but that of his publishers, and that he was a literary hero bound to be worshipped by all literary grades of men, down to the "devils" of the printing-office. All that time Thackeray, the older man, was still doubting, still hesitating, still struggling. Everyone then had accepted the name of Charles Dickens. That of William Thackeray was hardly known beyond the circle of those who are careful to make themselves acquainted with such matters. It was then the custom, more generally than it is at present, to maintain anonymous writing in magazines. Now, if anything of special merit be brought out, the name of the author, if not published, is known. It was much less so at the period in question; and as the world of readers began to be acquainted with Jeames Yellowplush, Catherine Hayes, and other heroes and heroines, the name of the author had to be inquired for. I remember myself, when I was already well acquainted with the immortal Jeames, asking who was the writer. The works of Charles Dickens were at that time as well known to be his, and as widely read in England, as those almost of Shakespeare.

It will be said, of course, that this came from the earlier popu-

larity of Dickens. That is of course; but why should it have been so? They had begun to make their effort much at the same time; and if there was any advantage in point of position as they commenced, it was with Thackeray. It might be said that the genius of the one was brighter than that of the other, or, at any rate, that it was more precocious. But after-judgment has, I think, not declared either of the suggestions to be true. I will make no comparison between two such rivals, who were so distinctly different from each, and each of whom, within so very short a period, has come to stand on a pedestal so high—the two exalted to so equal a vocation. And if Dickens showed the best of his power early in life, so did Thackeray the best of his intellect. In no display of mental force did he rise above *Barry Lyndon*. I hardly know how the teller of a narrative shall hope to mount in simply intellectual faculty above the effort there made. In what, then, was the difference? Why was Dickens already a great man when Thackeray was still a literary Bohemian?

The answer is to be found not in the extent or in the nature of the genius of either man, but in the condition of mind—which indeed may be read plainly in their works by those who have eyes to see. The one was steadfast, industrious, full of purpose, never doubting of himself, always putting his best foot foremost and standing firmly on it when he got it there; with no inward trepidation, with no moments in which he was half inclined to think that this race was not for his winning, this goal not to be reached by his struggles. The sympathy of friends was good to him, but he could have done without it. The good opinion which he had of himself was never shaken by adverse criticism; and the criticism on the other side, by which it was exalted, came from the enumeration of the number of copies sold. He was a firm, reliant man, very little prone to change, who, when he had discovered the nature of his own talent, knew how to do the very best with it.

It may almost be said that Thackeray was the very opposite of this. Unsteadfast, idle, changeable of purpose, aware of his own intellect but not trusting it, no man ever failed more generally than he to put his best foot foremost. Full as his works are of pathos, full of humour, full of love and charity, tending, as they always do, to truth and honour, and manly worth and womanly modesty, excelling, as they seem to me to do, most other written precepts that I know, they always seem to lack something that might have been there. There is a touch of vagueness which indicates that his pen was not firm while he was using it. He seems to me to have been dreaming ever of some high flight, and then to have told himself, with a half-broken heart, that it was beyond his power to soar up into those bright regions. I can fancy, as the sheets went from him every day, he told himself, in regard to every sheet, that it was a failure. Dickens was quite sure of his sheets.

"I have got to make it shorter!" Then he would put his hands in his pockets, and stretch himself, and straighten the lines of his face, over which a smile would come, as though this intimation

from his editor were the best joke in the world; and he would walk away, with his heart bleeding, and every nerve in an agony. There are none of us who want to have much of his work shortened now.

In 1837 Thackeray married Isabella, daughter of Colonel Matthew Shawe, and from this union there came three daughters, Anne, Jane, and Harriet. The name of the eldest, now Mrs. Richmond Ritchie, who has followed so closely in her father's steps, is a household word to the world of novel readers; the second died as a child; the younger lived to marry Leslie Stephen, who is too well known for me to say more than that he wrote, the other day, the little volume on Dr. Johnson in this series; but she, too, has now followed her father. Of Thackeray's married life what need be said shall be contained in a very few words. It was grievously unhappy: but the misery of it came from God, and was in no wise due to human fault. She became ill, and her mind failed her. There was a period during which he would not believe that her illness was more than illness, and then he clung to her and waited on her with an assiduity of affection which only made his task the more painful to him. At last it became evident that she should live in the companionship of some one with whom her life might be altogether quiet, and she has since been domiciled with a lady with whom she has been happy. Thus she was, after but a few years of married life, taken away from him, and he became, as it were, a widower till the end of his days.

At this period, and indeed for some years after his marriage, his chief literary dependence was on *Fraser's Magazine*. He wrote also at this time in the *New Monthly Magazine*. In 1840 he brought out his *Paris Sketch Book*, as to which he tells us, by a notice printed with the first edition, that half of the sketches had already been published in various periodicals. Here he used the name Michael Angelo Titmarsh, as he did also with the *Journey from Cornhill to Cairo*. Dickens had called himself Boz, and clung to the name with persistency as long as the public would permit it. Thackeray's affection for assumed names was more intermittent, though I doubt whether he used his own name altogether till it appeared on the title-page of *Vanity Fair*. About this time began his connection with *Punch*, in which much of his best work appeared. Looking back at our old friend as he used to come out from week to week at this time, we can hardly boast that we used to recognize how good the literary pabulum was that was then given for our consumption. We have to admit that the ordinary reader, as the ordinary picture-seer, requires to be guided by a name. We are moved to absolute admiration by a Raphael or a Hobbema, but hardly till we have learned the name of the painter, or, at any rate, the manner of his painting. I am not sure that all lovers of poetry would recognise a *Lycidas* coming from some hitherto unknown Milton. Gradually the good picture or the fine poem makes its way into the minds of a slowly discerning public. *Punch*, no doubt, became very popular, owing, perhaps,

more to Leech, its artist, than to any other single person. Gradually the world of readers began to know that there was a speciality of humour to be found in its pages—fun and sense, satire and good-humour, compressed together in small literary morsels as the nature of its columns required. Gradually the name of Thackeray as one of the band of brethren was buzzed about, and gradually became known as that of the chief of the literary brothers. But during the years in which he did much for *Punch*, say from 1843 to 1853, he was still struggling to make good his footing in literature. They knew him well in the *Punch* office, and no doubt the amount and regularity of the cheques from Messrs. Bradbury and Evans, the then and still owners of that happy periodical, made him aware that he had found for himself a satisfactory career. In "a good day for himself, the journal, and the world, Thackeray found *Punch*." This was said by his old friend Shirley Brooks, who himself lived to be editor of the paper and died in harness, and was said most truly. *Punch* was more congenial to him, and no doubt more generous, than *Fraser*. There was still something of the literary Bohemian about him, but not as it had been before. He was still unfixed, looking out for some higher career, not altogether satisfied to be no more than one of an anonymous band of brothers, even though the brothers were the brothers of *Punch*. We can only imagine what were his thoughts as to himself and that other man, who was then known as the great novelist of the day—of a rivalry with whom he was certainly conscious. *Punch* was very much to him, but was not quite enough. That must have been very clear to himself as he meditated the beginning of *Vanity Fair*.

Of the contributions to the periodical, the best known now are *The Snob Papers* and *The Ballads of Policeman X*. But they were very numerous. Of Thackeray as a poet, or maker of verses, I will say a few works in a chapter which will be devoted to his own so-called ballads. Here it seems only necessary to remark that there was not apparently any time in his career at which he began to think seriously of appearing before the public as a poet. Such was the intention early in their career with many of our best known prose writers, with Milton, and Goldsmith, and Samuel Johnson, with Scott, Macaulay, and more lately with Matthew Arnold; writers of verse and prose who ultimately prevailed some in one direction, and others in the other. Milton and Goldsmith have been known best as poets, Johnson and Macaulay as writers of prose. But with all of them there has been a distinct effort in each art. Thackeray seems to have tumbled into versification by accident; writing it as amateurs do, a little now and again for his own delectation, and to catch the tastes of partial friends. The reader feels that Thackeray would not have begun to print his verses unless the opportunity of doing so had been brought in his way by his doings in prose. And yet he had begun to write verses when he was very young;—at Cambridge, as we have seen, when he contributed more to the fame of Timbuctoo than I think even

Tennyson has done—and in his early years at Paris. Here again, though he must have felt the strength of his own mingled humour and pathos, he always struck with an uncertain note till he had gathered strength and confidence by popularity. Good as they generally were, his verses were accidents, written not as a writer writes who claims to be a poet, but as though they might have been the relaxations of a doctor or a barrister.

And so they were. When Thackeray first settled himself in London, to make his living among the magazines and newpapers, I do not imagine that he counted much on his poetic powers. He describes it all in his own dialogue between the pen and the album.

"Since he," says the pen, speaking of its master, Thackeray;

"Since he my faithful service did engage,
To follow him through his queer pilgrimage,
I've drawn and written many a line and page.

"Caricatures I scribbled have, and rhymes,
And dinner-cards, and picture pantomimes,
And many little children's books at times.

"I've writ the foolish fancy of his brain;
The aimless jest that, striking, hath caused pain
The idle word that he'd wish back again.

"I've helped him to pen many a line for bread."

It was thus he thought of his work. There had been caricatures, and rhymes, and many little children's books; and then the lines written for his bread, which, except that they were written for *Punch*, was hardly undertaken with a more serious purpose. In all of it there was ample seriousness, had he known it himself. What a tale of the restlessness, of the ambition, of the glory, of the misfortunes of a great country is given in the ballads of Peter the French drummer! Of that brain so full of fancy the pen had lightly written all the fancies. He did not know it when he was doing so, but with that word fancy he has described exactly the gift with which his brain was specially endowed. If a writer be accurate, or sonorous, or witty, or simply pathetic, he may, I think, gauge his own powers. He may do so after experience with something of certainty. But fancy is a gift which the owner of it cannot measure, and the power of which, when he is using it, he cannot himself understand. There is the same lambent flame flickering over everything he did, even the dinner-cards and the picture pantomimes. He did not in the least know what he put into those things. So it was with his verses. It was only by degrees, when he was told of it by others, that he found that they too were of infinite value to him in his profession.

The *Irish Sketch Book* came out in 1843, in which he used, but only half used, the name of Michael Angelo Titmarsh. He dedicates it to Charles Lever, and in signing the dedication gave his

own name. "Laying aside," he says, "for a moment the travelling title of Mr. Titmarsh, let me acknowledge these favours in my own name, and subscribe myself, &c., &c., W. M. Thackeray." So he gradually fell into the declaration of his own identity. In 1844 he made his journey to Turkey and Egypt—*From Cornhill to Grand Cairo*, as he called it, still using the old *nom de plume*, but again signing the dedication with his own name. It was now made to the captain of the vessel in which he encountered that famous white squall, in describing which he has shown the wonderful power he had over words.

In 1846 was commenced, in numbers, the novel which first made his name well known to the world. This was *Vanity Fair*, a work to which it is evident that he devoted all his mind. Up to this time his writings had consisted of short contributions, chiefly of sketches, each intended to stand by itself in the periodical to which it was sent. *Barry Lyndon* had hitherto been the longest; but that and *Catherine Hays* and the *Hoggarty Diamond*, though stories continued through various numbers, had not yet reached the dignity—or at any rate the length—of a three-volume novel. But of late novels had grown to be much longer than those of the old well-known measure. Dickens had stretched his to nearly double the length, and had published them in twenty numbers. The attempt had caught the public taste, and had been pre-eminently successful. The nature of the tale as originated by him was altogether unlike that to which the readers of modern novels had been used. No plot, with an arranged catastrophe or *dénoûment*, was necessary. Some untying of the various knots of the narrative no doubt were expedient, but these were of the simplest kind, done with the view of giving an end to that which might otherwise be endless. The adventures of a *Pickwick* or a *Nickleby* required very little of a plot, and this mode of telling a story, which might be continued on through any number of pages, as long as the characters were interesting, met with approval. Thackeray, who had never depended much on his plot in the shorter tales which he had hitherto told, determined to adopt the same form in his first great work but with these changes:—That as the central character with Dickens had always been made beautiful with unnatural virtue—for who was ever so unselfish as *Pickwick*, so manly and modest as *Nicholas*, or so good a boy as *Oliver?*—so should his centre of interest be in every respect abnormally bad.

As to Thackeray's reason for this—or rather as to that condition of mind which brought about this result—I will say something in a final chapter, in which I will endeavor to describe the nature and effect of his work generally. Here it will be necessary only to declare that, such was the choice he now made of a subject in his first attempt to rise out of a world of small literary contributions, into the more assured position of the author of a work of importance. We are aware that the monthly nurses of periodical literature did not at first smile on the effort. The proprietors of magazines did not see their way to undertake *Vanity Fair*, and the

publishers are said to have generally looked shy upon it. At last it was brought out in numbers—twenty-four numbers instead of twenty, as with those by Dickens—under the guardian hands of Messrs. Bradbury and Evans. This was completed in 1848, and then it was that, at the age of thirty-seven, Thackeray first achieved for himself a name and reputation through the country. Before this he had been known at *Fraser's* and at the *Punch* office. He was known at the Garrick Club, and had become individually popular among literary men in London. He had made many fast friends, and had been, as it were, found out by persons of distinction. But Jones, and Smith, and Robinson, in Liverpool, Manchester, and Birmingham, did not know him as they knew Dickens, Carlyle, Tennyson, and Macaulay—not as they knew Landseer, or Stansfeld, or Turner; not as they knew Macready, Charles Kean, or Miss Faucit. In that year, 1848, his name became common in the memoirs of the time. On the 5th of June I find him dining with Macready, to meet Sir J. Wilson, Panizzi, Landseer, and others. A few days afterwards Macready dined with him. "Dined with Thackeray, met the Gordons, Kenyons, Procters, Reeve, Villiers, Evans, Stansfeld, and saw Mrs. Sartoris and S. C. Dance, White, H. Goldsmid, in the evening." Again: "Dined with Forster, having called and taken up Brookfield, met Rintoul, Kenyon, Procter, Kinglake, Alfred Tennyson, Thackeray." Macready was very accurate in jotting down the names of those he entertained, who entertained him, or were entertained with him. *Vanity Fair* was coming out, and Thackeray, had become one of the personages in literary society. In the January number of 1848 the *Edinburgh Review* had an article on Thackeray's works generally as they were then known. It purports to combine the *Irish Sketch Book*, the *Journey from Cornhill to Grand Cairo*, and *Vanity Fair* as far as it had then gone; but it does in truth deal chiefly with the literary merits of the latter. I will quote a passage from the article, as proving in regard to Thackeray's work an opinion which was well founded, and as telling the story of his life as far as it was then known:

"Full many a valuable truth," says the reviewer, "has been sent undulating through the air by men who have lived and died unknown. At this moment the rising generation are supplied with the best of their mental aliment by writers whose names are a dead letter to the mass; and among the most remarkable of these is Michael Angelo Titmarsh, alias William Makepeace Thackeray, author of the *Irish Sketch Book*, of *A Journey from Cornhill to Grand Cairo*, of *Jeames's Diary*, of *The Snob Papers* in *Punch*, of *Vanity Fair*, &c., &c.

"Mr. Thackeray is now about thirty seven years of age, of a good family, and originally intended for the bar. He kept seven or eight terms at Cambridge, but left the university without taking a degree, with the view of becoming an artist; and we well remember, ten or twelve years ago, finding him day after day engaged in copying pictures in the Louvre, in order to qualify himself for his

intended profession. It may be doubted, however, whether any degree of assiduity would have enabled him to excel in the money-making branches, for his talent was altogether of the Hogarth kind, and was principally remarkable in the pen-and-ink sketches of character and situation, which he dashed off for the amusement of his friends. At the end of two or three years of desultory application he gave up the notion of becoming a painter, and took to literature. He set up and edited with marked ability a weekly journal, on the plan of *The Athenæum* and *Literary Gazette*, but was unable to compete successfully with such long-established rivals. He then became a regular man of letters—that is, he wrote for respectable magazines and newspapers, until the attention attracted to his contributions in *Fraser's Magazine* and *Punch* emboldened him to start on his own account, and risk an independent publication." Then follows a eulogistic and, as I think, a correct criticism on the book as far as it had gone. There are a few remarks perhaps a little less eulogistic as to some of his minor writings, *The Snob Papers* in particular; and at the end there is a statement with which I think we shall all now agree: "A writer with such a pen and pencil as Mr. Thackeray's is an acquisition of real and high value in our literature."

The reviewer has done his work in a tone friendly to the author, whom he knew*—as indeed it may be said that this little book will be written with the same feeling—but the public has already recognised the truth of the review generally. There can be no doubt that Thackeray, though he had hitherto been but a contributor of anonymous pieces to periodicals—to what is generally considered as merely the ephemeral literature of the month—had already become effective on the tastes and morals of readers. Affectation of finery; the vulgarity which apes good breeding but never approaches it; dishonest gambling, whether with dice or with railway shares; and that low taste for literary excitement which is gratified by mysterious murders and Old Bailey executions, had already received condign punishment from Yellowplush, Titmarsh, Fitzboodle, and Ikey Solomon. Under all those names Thackeray had plied his trade as a satirist. Though the truths, as the reviewer said, had been merely sent undulating through the air, they had already become effective.

Thackeray had now become a personage—one of the recognised stars of the literary heaven of the day. It was an honour to know him; and we may well believe that the givers of dinners were proud to have him among their guests. He had opened his oyster with his pen—an achievement which he cannot be said to have accomplished until *Vanity Fair* had come out. In inquiring about him from those who survive him, and knew him well in those days, I always hear the same account. "If I could only tell you the impromptu lines which fell from him!" "If I had only kept the

* The article was written by Abraham Hayward, who is still with us, and was no doubt instigated by a desire to assist Thackeray in his struggle upwards, in which it succeeded.

drawings from his pen, which used to be chucked about as though they were worth nothing!" "If I could only remember the drolleries!" Had they been kept, there might now be many volumes of these sketches, as to which the reviewer says that their talent was "altogether of the Hogarth kind." Could there be any kind more valuable? Like Hogarth, he could always make his picture tell his story; though, unlike Hogarth, he had not learned to draw. I have had sent to me for my inspection an album of drawings and letters, which, in the course of twenty years, from 1829 to 1849, were despatched from Thackeray to his old friend Edward Fitzgerald. Looking at the wit displayed in the drawings, I feel inclined to say that had he persisted he would have been a second Hogarth. There is a series of ballet scenes, in which "Flore et Zephyr" are the two chief performers, which for expression and drollery exceed anything that I know of the kind. The set in this book are lithographs, which were published, but I do not remember to have seen them elsewhere. There are still among us many who knew him well—Edward Fitzgerald and George Venables, James Spedding and Kinglake, Mrs. Procter,—the widow of Barry Cornwall, who loved him well—and Monckton Milnes, as he used to be, whose touching lines written just after Thackeray's death will close this volume, Frederick Pollock and Frank Fladgate, John Blackwood and William Russell—and they all tell the same story. Though he so rarely talked, as good talkers do, and was averse to sit down to work, there were always falling from his mouth and pen those little pearls. Among the friends who had been kindest and dearest to him in the days of his strugglings he once mentioned three to me—Matthew Higgins, or Jacob Omnium, as he was more popularly called; William Stirling, who became Sir William Maxwell; and Russell Sturgis, who is now the senior partner in the great house of Barings. Alas, only the last of these three is left among us! Thackeray was a man of no great power of conversation. I doubt whether he ever shone in what is called general society. He was not a man to be valuable at a dinner-table as a good talker. It was when there were but two or three together that he was happy himself and made others happy; and then it would rather be from some special piece of drollery that the joy of the moment would come, than from the discussion of ordinary topics. After so many years his old friends remember the fag-ends of the doggerel lines which used to drop from him without any effort on all occasions of jollity. And though he could be very sad—laden with melancholy, as I think must have been the case with him always—the feeling of fun would quickly come to him, and the queer rhymes would be poured out as plentifully as the sketches were made. Here is a contribution which I find hanging in the memory of an old friend, the serious nature of whose literary labours would certainly have driven such lines from his mind, had they not at the time caught fast hold of him:

"In the romantic little town of Highbury
My father kept a circulatin' library;

He followed in his youth that man immortal, who
Conquered the Frenchmen on the plains of Waterloo.
Mamma was an inhabitant of Drogheda,
Very good she was to darn and to embroider
In the famous island of Jamaica,
For thirty years I've been a sugar-baker;
And here I sit, the Muses' 'appy vot'ry,
A cultivatin' every kind of po'try."

There may, perhaps, have been a mistake in a line, but the poem has been handed down with fair correctness over a period of forty years. He was always versifying. He once owed me five pounds seventeen shillings and sixpence, his share of a dinner bill at Richmond. He sent me a check for the amount in rhyme, giving the proper financial document on the second half of a sheet of note-paper. I gave the poem away as an autograph, and now forget the lines. This was all trifling, the reader will say. No doubt Thackeray was always trifling, and yet always serious. In attempting to understand his character it is necessary for you to bear within your own mind the idea that he was always, within his own bosom, encountering melancholy with buffoonery, and meanness with satire. The very spirit of burlesque dwelt within him—a spirit which does not see the grand the less because of the travesties which it is always engendering.

In his youthful—all but boyish—days in London, he delighted to "put himself up" at the Bedford, in Covent Garden. Then, in his early married days, he lived in Albion Street, and from thence went to Great Coram Street, till his household there was broken up by his wife's illness. He afterwards took lodgings in St. James's Chambers, and then a house in Young Street, Kensington. Here he lived from 1847, when he was achieving his great triumph with *Vanity Fair*, down to 1853, when he removed to a house which he bought in Onslow Square. In Young Street there had come to lodge opposite to him an Irish gentleman, who, on the part of his injured country, felt very angry with Thackeray. *The Irish Sketch Book* had not been complimentary, nor were the descriptions which Thackeray had given generally of Irishmen; and there was extant an absurd idea that in his abominable heroine Catherine Hayes he had alluded to Miss Catherine Hayes, the Irish singer. Word was taken to Thackeray that this Irishman intended to come across the street and avenge his country on the calumniator's person. Thackeray immediately called upon the gentleman, and it was said that the visit was pleasant to both parties. There certainly was no blood shed.

He had now succeeded—in 1848—in making for himself a standing as a man of letters, and an income. What was the extent of his income I have no means of saying; nor is it a subject on which, as I think, inquiry should be made. But he was not satisfied with his position. He felt it to be precarious, and he was always thinking of what he owed to his two girls. That *arbitrium popularis auræ* on which he depended for his daily bread was not regarded

by him with the confidence which it deserved. He did not, probably, know how firm was the hold he had obtained of the public ear. At any rate he was anxious, and endeavoured to secure for himself a permanent income in the public service. He had become by this time acquainted, probably intimate, with the Marquis of Clanricarde, who was then Postmaster-General. In 1848 there fell a vacancy in the situation of Assistant-Secretary at the General Post Office, and Lord Clanricarde either offered it to him or promised to give it to him. The Postmaster-General had the disposal of the place, but was not altogether free from control in the matter. When he made known his purpose at the Post-Office, he was met by an assurance from the officer next under him that the thing could not be done. The services were wanted of a man who had had experience in the Post-Office ; and, moreover, it was necessary that the feelings of other gentlemen should be consulted. Men who have been serving in an office many years do not like to see even a man of genius put over their heads. In fact, the office would have been up in arms at such an injustice. Lord Clanricarde, who in a matter of patronage was not scrupulous, was still a good-natured man and amenable. He attempted to befriend his friend till he found that it was impossible, and then, with the best grace in the world, accepted the official nominee that was offered to him.

It may be said that had Thackeray succeeded in that attempt he would surely have ruined himself. No man can be fit for the management and performance of special work who has learned nothing of it before his thirty-seventh year; and no man could have been less so than Thackeray. There are men who, though they be not fit, are disposed to learn their lesson and make themselves as fit as possible. Such cannot be said to have been the case with this man. For the special duties which he would have to perform, consisting to a great extent of the maintenance of discipline over a large body of men, training is required, and the service would have suffered for awhile under any untried elderly tiro Another man might have put himself into harness. Thackeray never would have done so. The details of his work after the first month would have been inexpressibly wearisome to him. To have gone into the city, and to have remained there every day from eleven till five would have been all but impossible to him. He would not have done it. And then he would have been tormented by the feeling that he was taking the pay and not doing the work. There is a belief current, not confided to a few, that a man may be a Government Secretary with a generous salary and have nothing to do. The idea is something that remains to us from the old days of sinecures. If there be now remaining places so pleasant, or gentlemen so happy, I do not know them. Thackeray's notion of his future duties was probably very vague. He would have repudiated the notion that he was looking for a sinecure, but no doubt considered that the duties would be easy and light. It is not too much to assert, that he who could drop his pearls as I have said above, throwing them wide cast without an effort, would have found his

work as Assistant-Secretary at the General Post-Office to be altogether too much for him. And then no doubt it was his intention to join literature with the Civil Service. He had been taught to regard Civil Service as easy, and had counted upon himself as able to add it to his novels, and his work with his *Punch* brethren, and to his contributions generally to the literature of the day. He might have done so, could he have risen at five, and have sat at his private desk for three hours before he began his official routine at the public one. A capability for grinding, an aptitude for continuous task work, a disposition to sit in one's chair as if fixed to it by cobbler's wax, will enable a man in the prime of life to go through the tedium of a second day's work every day; but of all men Thackeray was the last to bear the wearisome perseverance of such a life. Some more or less continuous attendance at his office he must have given, and with it would have gone *Punch* and the novels, the ballads, the burlesques, the essays, the lectures, and the monthly papers full of mingled satire and tenderness, which have left to us that Thackeray which we could ill afford to lose out of the literature of the nineteenth century. And there would have remained to the Civil Service the memory of a disgraceful job.

He did not, however, give up the idea of the Civil Service. In a letter to his American friend, Mr. Reed, dated 8th November, 1854, he says: "The secretaryship of our Legation at Washington was vacant the other day, and I instantly asked for it; but in the very kindest letter Lord Clarendon showed how the petition was impossible. First, the place was given away. Next, it would not be fair to appoint out of the service. But the first was an excellent reason—not a doubt of it." The validity of the second was probably not so apparent to him as it is to one who has himself waited long for promotion. "So if ever I come," he continues, "as I hope and trust to do this time next year, it must be in my own coat, and not the Queen's." Certainly in his own coat, and not in the Queen's, must Thackeray do anything by which he could mend his fortune or make his reputation. There never was a man less fit for the Queen's coat.

Nevertheless he held strong ideas that much was due by the Queen's ministers to men of letters, and no doubt had his feelings of slighted merit, because no part of the debt due was paid to him. In 1850 he wrote a letter to *The Morning Chronicle*, which has since been republished, in which he alludes to certain opinions which had been put forth in *The Examiner*. "I don't see," he says, "why men of letters should not very cheerfully coincide with Mr. Examiner in accepting all the honours, places, and prizes which they can get. The amount of such as will be awarded to them will not, we may be pretty sure, impoverish the country much; and if it is the custom of the State to reward by money, or titles of honour, or stars and garters of any sort, individuals who do the country service—and if individuals are gratified at having 'Sir' or 'My lord' appended to their names, or stars and ribbons hooked on to their coats and waistcoats, as men most undoubtedly are, and as

their wives, families, and relations are—there can be no reason why men of letters should not have the chance, as well as men of the robe or the sword; or why, if honour and money are good for one profession, they should not be good for another. No man in other callings thinks himself degraded by receiving a reward from his Government; nor, surely, need the literary man be more squeamish about pensions, and ribbons, and titles, than the ambassador, or general, or judge. Every European state but ours rewards its men of letters. The American Government gives them their full share of its small patronage; and if Americans, why not Englishmen?"

In this a great subject is discussed which would be too long for these pages; but I think that there now exists a feeling that literature can herself, for herself, produce a rank as effective as any that a Queen's minister can bestow. Surely it would be a repainting of the lily, an adding a flavour to the rose, a gilding of refined gold to create to-morrow a Lord Viscount Tennyson, a Baron Carlyle, or a Right Honourable Sir Robert Browning. And as for pay and pension, the less the better of it for any profession, unless so far as it may be payment made for work done. Then the higher the better, in literature as in all other trades. It may be doubted even whether a special rank of its own be good for literature, such as that which is achieved by the happy possessors of the forty chairs of the Academy in France. Even though they had an angel to make the choice—which they have not—that angel would do more harm to the excluded than good to the selected.

Pendennis, *Esmond*, and *The Newcomes* followed *Vanity Fair*—not very quickly indeed, always at an interval of two years—in 1850, 1852, and 1854. As I purpose to devote a separate short chapter, or part of a chapter, to each of these, I need say nothing here of their special merits or demerits. *Esmond* was brought out as a whole. The others appeared in numbers. "He lisped in numbers, for the numbers came." It is a mode of pronunciation in literature by no means very articulate, but easy of production and lucrative. But though easy it is seductive, and leads to idleness. An author by means of it can raise money and reputation on his book before he has written it, and when the pang of parturition is over in regard to one part, he feels himself entitled to a period of ease because the amount required for the next division will occupy him only half the month. This to Thackeray was so alluring that the entirety of the final half was not always given to the task. His self-reproaches and bemoanings when sometimes the day for reappearing would come terribly nigh, while yet the necessary amount of copy was far from being ready, were often very ludicrous and very sad—ludicrous because he never told of his distress without adding to it something of ridicule which was irresistible, and sad because those who loved him best were aware that physical suffering had already fallen upon him, and that he was deterred by illness from the exercise of continuous energy. I myself did not know him till after the time now in question. My

acquaintance with him was quite late in his life. But he has told me something of it, and I have heard from those who lived with him how continual were his sufferings. In 1854, he says in one of his letters to Mr. Reed—the only private letters of his which I know to have been published: "I am to-day just out of bed after another, about the dozenth, severe fit of spasms which I have had this year. My book would have been written but for them." His work was always going on, but though not fuller of matter—that would have been almost impossible—would have been better in manner had he been delayed neither by suffering nor by that palsying of the energies which suffering produces.

This ought to have been the happiest period of his life, and should have been very happy. He had become fairly easy in his circumstances. He had succeeded in his work, and had made for himself a great name. He was fond of popularity, and especially anxious to be loved by a small circle of friends. These good things he had thoroughly achieved. Immediately after the publication of *Vanity Fair* he stood high among the literary heroes of his country, and had endeared himself especially to a special knot of friends. His face and figure, his six feet four in height, with his flowing hair, already nearly gray, and his broken nose, his broad forehead and ample chest, encountered everywhere either love or respect; and his daughters to him were all the world—the bairns of whom he says, at the end of the *White Squall* ballad;

> 'I thought, as day was breaking,
> My little girls were waking,
> And smiling, and making
> A prayer at home for me."

Nothing could have been more tender or endearing than his relations with his children. But still there was a skeleton in his cupboard—or rather two skeletons. His home had been broken up by his wife's malady, and his own health was shattered. When he was writing *Pendennis*, in 1849, he had a severe fever, and then those spasms came, of which four or five years afterwards he wrote to Mr. Reed. His home, as a home should be, was never restored to him—or his health. Just at that period of life at which a man generally makes a happy exchange in taking his wife's drawing-room in lieu of the smoking-room of his club, and assumes those domestic ways of living which are becoming and pleasant for matured years, that drawing-room and those domestic ways were closed against him. The children were then no more than babies, as far as society was concerned—things to kiss and play with, and make a home happy if they could only have had their mother with them. I have no doubt there were those who thought that Thackeray was very jolly under his adversity. Jolly he was. It was the manner of the man to be so—if that continual playfulness which was natural to him, lying over a melancholy which was as continual, be compatible with jollity. He laughed, and ate, and drank, and threw his pearls about with miraculous profusion. But I fancy that he was far from happy. I remember once, when I was

young, receiving advice as to the manner in which I had better spend my evenings; I was told that I ought to go home, drink tea, and read good books. It was excellent advice, but I found that the reading of good books in solitude was not an occupation congenial to me. It was so, I take it, with Thackeray. He did not like his lonely drawing-room, and went back to his life among the clubs by no means with contentment.

In 1853, Thackeray having then his own two girls to provide for, added a third to his family, and adopted Amy Crowe, the daughter of an old friend, and sister of the well-known artist now among us. How it came to pass that she wanted a home, or that this special home suited her, it would be unnecessary here to tell even if I knew. But that he did give a home to this young lady, making her in all respects the same as another daughter, should be told of him. He was a man who liked to broaden his back for the support of others, and to make himself easy under such burdens In 1862, she married a Thackeray cousin, a young officer with the Victoria Cross, Edward Thackeray, and went out to India, where she died.

In 1854, the year in which *The Newcomes* came out, Thackeray had broken his close alliance with *Punch*. In December of that year there appeared from his pen an article in *The Quarterly* on *John Leech's Pictures of Life and Character*. It is a rambling discourse on picture-illustration in general, full of interest, but hardly good as a criticism—a portion of literary work for which he was not specially fitted. In it he tells us how Richard Doyle, the artist, had given up his work for *Punch*, not having been able, as a Roman Catholic, to endure the skits which, at that time were appearing in one number after another against what was then called Papal aggression. The reviewer—Thackeray himself—then tells us of the secession of himself from the board of brethren. "Another member of Mr. Punch's cabinet, the biographer of *Jeames*, the author of *The Snob Papers*, resigned his functions, on account of Mr. Punch's assaults upon the present Emperor of the French nation, whose anger Jeames thought it was unpatriotic to arouse." How hard it must be for Cabinets to agree! This man or that is sure to have some pet conviction of his own, and the better the man the stronger the conviction! Then the reviewer went on in favour of the artist of whom he was specially speaking, making a comparison which must at the time have been odious enough to some of the brethren. "There can be no blinking the fact that in Mr. Punch's Cabinet John Leech is the right-hand man. Fancy a number of *Punch* without Leech's pictures! What would you give for it?" Then he breaks out into strong admiration of that one friend—perhaps with a little disregard as to the feelings of other friends.* This *Critical Review*, if it may properly be so

* For a week there existed at the *Punch* office a grudge against Thackeray in reference to this awkward question: "What wou'd you give for your *Punch* without John Leech?" Then he asked the confraternity to dinner—*more Thackerayano*—and the confraternity came. Who can doubt but they were very jolly over the little blunder? For years afterwards Thackeray was a guest at the well-known *Punch* dinner, though he was no longer one of the contributors.

called—at any rate it is so named as now published—is to be found in our author's collected works, in the same volume with *Catherine*. It is there preceded by another, from *The Westminster Review*, written fourteen years earlier, on *The Genius of Cruikshank*. This contains a descriptive catalogue of Cruikshank's works up to that period, and is interesting, from the piquant style in which it is written. I fancy that these two are the only efforts of the kind which he made—and in both he dealt with the two great caricaturists of his time, he himself being, in the imaginative part of a caricaturist's work, equal in power to either of them.

We now come to a phase of Thackeray's life in which he achieved a remarkable success, attributable rather to his fame as a writer than to any particular excellence in the art which he then exercised. He took upon himself the functions of a lecturer, being moved to do so by a hope that he might thus provide a sum of money for the future sustenance of his children. No doubt he had been advised to this course, though I do not know from whom specially the advice may have come. Dickens had already considered the subject, but had not yet consented to read in public for money on his own account. John Forster, writing of the year 1846, says of Dickens and the then only thought-of exercise of a new profession: "I continued to oppose, for reasons to be stated in their place, that which he had set his heart upon too strongly to abandon, and which I still can wish he had preferred to surrender with all that seemed to be its enormous gain." And again he says, speaking of a proposition which had been made to Dickens from the town of Bradford: "At first this was entertained, but was abandoned, with some reluctance, upon the argument that to become publicly a reader must alter, without improving, his position publicly as a writer, and that it was a change to be justified only when the higher calling should have failed of the old success." The meaning of this was that the money to be made would be sweet, but that the descent to a profession which was considered to be lower than that of literature itself would carry with it something that was bitter. It was as though one who had sat on the Woolsack as Lord Chancellor should raise the question whether, for the sake of the income attached to it, he might, without disgrace, occupy a seat on a lower bench; as though an architect should consider with himself the propriety of making his fortune as a contractor; or the head of a college lower his dignity, while he increased his finances, by taking pupils. When such discussions arise, money generally carries the day—and should do so. When convinced that money may be earned without disgrace, we ought to allow money to carry the day. When we talk of sordid gain and filthy lucre, we are generally hypocrites. If gains be sordid and lucre filthy, where is the priest, the lawyer, the doctor, or the man of literature, who does not wish for dirty hands? An income, and the power of putting by something for old age, something for those who are to come after, is the wholesome and ac-

knowledged desire of all professional men. Thackeray having children, and being gifted with no power of making his money go very far, was anxious enough on the subject. We may say now, that had he confined himself to his pen, he would not have wanted while he lived, but would have left but little behind him. That he was anxious we have seen, by his attempts to subsidise his literary gains by a Government office. I cannot but think that had he undertaken public duties for which he was ill qualified, and received a salary which he could hardly have earned, he would have done less for his fame than by reading to the public. Whether he did that well or ill, he did it well enough for the money. The people who heard him, and who paid for their seats, were satisfied with their bargain—as they were also in the case of Dickens; and I venture to say that in becoming publicly a reader, neither did Dickens or Thackeray "alter his position as a writer," and "that it was a change to be justified," though the success of the old calling had in no degree waned. What Thackeray did enabled him to leave a comfortable income for his children, and one earned honestly, with the full approval of the world around him.

Having saturated his mind with the literature of Queen Anne's time—not probably, in the first instance, as a preparation for *Esmond*, but in such a way as to induce him to create an Esmond—he took the authors whom he knew so well as the subject for his first series of lectures. He wrote *The English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century* in 1851, while he must have been at work on *Esmond*, and first delivered the course at Willis's Rooms in that year. He afterwards went with these through many of our provincial towns, and then carried them to the United States, where he delivered them to large audiences in the winter of 1852 and 1853. Some few words as to the merits of the composition I will endeavour to say in another place. I myself never heard him lecture, and can therefore give no opinion of the performance. That which I have heard from others has been very various. It is, I think, certain that he had none of those wonderful gifts of elocution which made it a pleasure to listen to Dickens, whatever he read or whatever he said; nor had he that power of application by using which his rival taught himself with accuracy the exact effect to be given to every word. The rendering of a piece by Dickens was composed as an oratorio is composed, and was then studied. And the piece was all given by memory, without any looking at the notes or words. There was nothing of this with Thackeray. But the thing read was in itself of great interest to educated people. The words were given clearly, with sufficient intonation for easy understanding, so that they who were willing to hear something from him felt on hearing that they had received full value for their money. At any rate, the lectures were successful. The money was made—and was kept.

He came from his first trip to America to his new house in Onslow Square, and then published *The Newcomes*. This, too, was one of his great works, as to which I shall have to speak here

after. Then, having enjoyed his success in the first attempt to lecture, he prepared a second series, He never essayed the kind of reading which with Dickens became so wonderfully popular. Dickens recited portions from his well-known works. Thackeray wrote his lectures expressly for the purpose. They have since been added to his other literature, but they were prepared as lectures. The second series were *The Four Georges*. In a lucrative point of view they were even more successful than the first, the sum of money realised in the United States having been considerable. In England they were less popular, even if better attended, the subject chosen having been distasteful to many. There arose the question whether too much freedom had not been taken with an office which, though it be no longer considered to be founded on divine right, is still as sacred as can be anything that is human. If there is to remain among us a sovereign, that sovereign, even though divested of political power, should be endowed with all that personal respect can give. If we wish ourselves to be high, we should treat that which is over us as high. And this should not depend altogether on personal character, though we know—as we have reason to know—how much may be added to the firmness of the feeling by personal merit. The respect of which we speak should, in the strongest degree, be a possession of the immediate occupant, and will naturally become dim —or perhaps be exaggerated—in regard to the past, as history or fable may tell of them. No one need hesitate to speak his mind of King John, let him be ever so strong a stickler for the privileges of majesty. But there are degrees of distance, and the throne of which we wish to preserve the dignity seems to be assailed when unmeasured evil is said of one who has sat there within our own memory. There would seem to each of us to be a personal affront were a departed relative delineated with all those faults by which we must own that even our near relatives have been made imperfect. It is a general conviction as to this which so frequently turns the biography of those recently dead into mere eulogy. The fictitious charity which is enjoined by the *de mortuis nil nisi bonum* banishes truth. The feeling of which I speak almost leads me at this moment to put down my pen. And, if so much be due to all subjects, is less due to a sovereign ?

Considerations such as these diminished, I think, the popularity of Thackeray's second series of lectures ; or, rather, not their popularity, but the estimation in which they were held. On this head he defended himself more than once very gallantly, and had a great deal to say on his side of the question. "Suppose, for example, in America—Philadelphia or in New York—that I had spoken about George IV. in terms of praise and affected reverence, do you believe they would have hailed his name with cheers, or have heard it with anything of respect?" And again: "We degrade our own honour and the sovereign's by unduly and unjustly praising him; and the mere slaverer and flatterer is one who comes

forward, as it were, with flash notes, and pays with false coin his tribute to Cæsar. I don't disguise that I feel somehow on my trial here for loyalty—for honest English feeling." This was said by Thackeray at a dinner at Edinburgh, in 1857, and shows how the matter rested on his mind. Thackeray's loyalty was no doubt true enough, but was mixed with but little of reverence. He was one who revered modesty and innocence rather than power, against which he had in the bottom of his heart something of republican tendency. His leaning was no doubt of the more manly kind. But in what he said at Edinburgh he hardly hit the nail on the head. No one had suggested that he should have said good things of a king which he did not believe to be true. The question was whether it may not be well sometimes for us to hold our tongues. An American literary man, here in England, would not lecture on the morals of Hamilton, on the manners of General Jackson, on the general amenities of President Johnson.

In 1857 Thackeray stood for Oxford, in the Liberal interest, in opposition to Mr. Cardwell. He had been induced to do this by his old friend Charles Neate, who himself twice sat for Oxford, and died now not many months since. He polled 1,017 votes, against 1,070 by Mr. Cardwell; and was thus again saved by his good fortune from attempting to fill a situation in which he would not have shone. There are, no doubt, many to whom a seat in Parliament comes almost as the birthright of a well-born and well-to-do English gentleman. They go there with no more idea of shining than they do when they are elected to a first-class club—hardly with more idea of being useful. It is the thing to do, and the House of Commons is the place where a man ought to be—for a certain number of hours. Such men neither succeed nor fail, for nothing is expected of them. From such a one as Thackeray something would have been expected, which would not have been forthcoming. He was too desultory for regular work—full of thought, but too vague for practical questions. He could not have endured to sit for two or three hours at a time with his hat over his eyes, pretending to listen. as is the duty of a good legislator. He was a man intolerant of tedium, and in the best of his time impatient of slow work. Nor, though his liberal feelings were very strong, were his political convictions definite or accurate. He was a man who mentally drank in much, feeding his fancy hourly with what he saw, what he heard, what he read, and then pouring it all out with an immense power of amplification. But it would have been impossible for him to study and bring home to himself the various points of a complicated bill with a hundred and fifty clauses. In becoming a man of letters, and taking that branch of letters which fell to him, he obtained the special place that was fitted for him. He was a round peg in a round hole. There was no other hole which he would have fitted nearly so well. But he had his moment of political ambition, like others—and paid a thousand pounds for his attempt.

In 1857 the first number of *The Virginians* appeared; and the last—the twenty-fourth—in October, 1859. This novel, as all my readers are aware, is a continuance of *Esmond*, and will be spoken of in its proper place. He was then forty eight years old, very gray, with much of age upon him, which had come from suffering—age shown by dislike of activity and by an old man's way of thinking about many things—speaking as though the world were all behind him instead of before; but still with a stalwart outward bearing, very erect in his gait, and a countenance peculiarly expressive and capable of much dignity. I speak of his personal appearance at this time, because it was then only that I became acquainted with him. In 1859 he undertook the last great work of his life, the editorship of *The Cornhill Magazine*, a periodical set on foot by Mr. George Smith, of the house of Smith and Elder, with an amount of energy greater than has generally been bestowed upon such enterprises. It will be well remembered still how much *The Cornhill* was talked about and thought of before it first appeared, and how much of that thinking and talking was due to the fact that Mr. Thackeray was to edit it. *Macmillan's*, I think, was the first of the shilling magazines, having preceded *The Cornhill* by a month, and it would ill become me, who have been a humble servant to each of them, to give to either any preference. But it must be acknowledged that a great deal was expected from *The Cornhill*, and I think it will be confessed that it was the general opinion that a great deal was given by it. Thackeray had become big enough to give a special *éclat* to any literary exploit to which he attached himself. Since the days of *The Constitutional* he had fought his way up the ladder, and knew how to take his stand there with an assurance of success. When it became known to the world of readers that a new magazine was to appear under Thackeray's editorship, the world of readers was quite sure that there would be a large sale. Of the first number over one hundred and ten thousand were sold, and of the second and third over one hundred thousand. It is in the nature of such things that the sale should fall off when the novelty is over. People believe that a new delight has come, a new joy for ever, and then find that the joy is not quite so perfect or enduring as they had expected. But the commencement of such enterprises may be taken as a measure of what will follow. The magazine, either by Thackeray's name or by its intrinsic merits—probably by both—achieved a great success. My acquaintance with him grew from my having been one of his staff from the first.

About two months before the opening day I wrote to him suggesting that he should accept from me a series of four short stories on which I was engaged. I got back a long letter in which he said nothing about my short stories, but asking whether I could go to work at once and let him have a long novel, so that it might begin with the first number. At the same time I heard from the publisher, who suggested some interesting little details as to honorarium The little details were very interesting, but absolutely no time was allowed to me. It was required that the first portion of my book

should be in the printer's hands within a month. Now it was my theory—and ever since this occurrence has been my practice—to see the end of my own work before the public should see the commencement.* If I did this thing I must not only abandon my theory, but instantly contrive a story, or begin to write it before it was contrived. That was what I did, urged by the interesting nature of the details. A novelist cannot always at the spur of the moment make his plot and create his characters who shall, with an arranged sequence of events, live with a certain degree of eventful decorum, through that portion of their lives which is to be portrayed. I hesitated, but allowed myself to be allured to what I felt to be wrong, much dreading the event. How seldom is it that theories stand the wear and tear of practice! I will not say that the story which came was good, but it was received with greater favor than any I had written before or have written since. I think that almost anything would have been then accepted coming under Thackeray's editorship.

I was astonished that work should be required in such haste, knowing that much preparation had been made, and that the service of almost any English novelist might have been obtained if asked for in due time. It was my readiness that was needed, rather than any other gift! The riddle was read to me after a time. Thackeray had himself intended to begin with one of his own great novels, but had put it off till it was too late. *Lovel the Widower* was commenced at the same time with my own story, but *Lovel the Widower* was not substantial enough to appear as the principal joint at the banquet. Though your guests will undoubtedly dine off the little delicacies you provide for them, there must be a heavy saddle of mutton among the viands prepared. I was the saddle of mutton, Thackeray having omitted to get his joint down to the fire in time enough. My fitness lay in my capacity for quick roasting.

It may be interesting to give a list of the contributors to the first number. My novel called *Framley Parsonage* came first. At this banquet the saddle of mutton was served before the delicacies. Then there was a paper by Sir John Bowring on *The Chinese and Outer Barbarians*. The commencing number of *Lovel the Widower* followed. George Lewes came next with his first chapters of *Studies in Animal Life*. Then there was Father Prout's *Inauguration Ode*, dedicated to the author of *Vanity Fair*—which should have led the way. I need hardly say that Father Prout was the Rev. F. Mahony. Then followed *Our Volunteers*, by Sir John Burgoyne; *A Man of Letters of the Last Generation*, by Thornton Hunt; *The Search for Sir John Franklin*, from a private journal of an officer of the Fox, now Sir Allen Young; and *The first Morning of* 1860, by Mrs. Archer Clive. The number was concluded by the first of those *Roundabout Papers* by Thackeray himself,

* I had begun an Irish story and half finished it, which would reach just the required length. Would that do? I asked. I was civilly told that my Irish story would no doubt be charming, but was not quite the thing that was wanted. Could I not begin a new one—English—and if possible about clergymen? The details were so interesting that had a couple of archbishops been demanded, I should have produced them.

which became so delightful a portion of the literature of *The Cornhill Magazine.*

It would be out of my power, and hardly interesting, to give an entire list of those who wrote for *The Cornhill* under Thackeray's editorial direction. But I may name a few, to show how strong was the support which he received. Those who contributed to the first number I have named. Among those who followed were Alfred Tennyson, Jacob Omnium, Lord Houghton, William Russell, Mrs. Beecher Stowe, Mrs. Browning, Robert Bell, George Augustus Sala, Mrs. Gaskell, James Hinton, Mary Howitt, John Kaye, Charles Lever, Frederick Locker, Laurence Oliphant, John Ruskin, Fitzjames Stephen, T. A. Trollope, Henry Thompson, Herman Merivale, Adelaide Proctor, Matthew Arnold, the present Lord Lytton, and Miss Thackeray, now Mrs. Ritchie. Thackeray continued the editorship for two years and four months, namely, up to April, 1862; but, as all readers will remember, he continued to write for it till he died, the day before Christmas Day, in 1863. His last contribution was, I think, a paper written for and published in the November number, called "*Strange to say on Club Paper*," in which he vindicated Lord Clyde from the accusation of having taken the club stationery home with him. It was not a great subject, for no one could or did believe that the Field-Marshal had been guilty of any meanness; but the handling of it has made it interesting, and his indignation has made it beautiful.

The magazine was a great success, but justice compels me to say that Thackeray was not a good editor. As he would have been an indifferent civil servant, an indifferent member of Parliament, so was he perfunctory as an editor. It has sometimes been thought well to select a popular literary man as an editor; first, because his name will attract, and then with an idea that he who can write well himself will be a competent judge of the writings of others. The first may sell a magazine, but will hardly make it good; and the second will not avail much, unless the editor so situated be patient enough to read what is sent to him. Of a magazine editor it is required that he should be patient, scrupulous, judicious, but above all things hard-hearted. I think it may be doubted whether Thackeray did bring himself to read the basketfuls of manuscripts with which he was deluged, but he probably did, sooner or later, read the touching little private notes by which they were accompanied —the heartrending appeals, in which he was told that if this or the other little article could be accepted and paid for, a starving family might be saved from starvation for a month. He tells us how he felt on receiving such letters in one of his *Roundabout Papers*, which he calls "*Thorns in the cushion.*" "How am I to know," he says—"though to be sure I begin to know now—as I take the letters off the tray, which of those envelopes contains a real *bona fide* letter, and which a thorn? One of the best invitations this year I mistook for a thorn letter, and kept it without opening." Then he gives the sample of a thorn letter. It is from a governess with a poem, and with a prayer for insertion and payment. "We

have known better days, sir. I have a sick and widowed mother to maintain, and little brothers and sisters who look to me." He could not stand this, and the money would be sent, out of his own pocket, though the poem might be—postponed, till happily it should be lost.

From such material a good editor could not be made. Nor, in truth, do I think that he did much of the editorial work. I had once made an arrangement, not with Thackeray, but with the proprietors, as to some little story. The story was sent back to me by Thackeray—rejected. *Virginibus puerisque!* That was the gist of his objection. There was a project in a gentleman's mind—as told in my story—to run away with a married woman! Thackeray's letter was very kind, very regretful—full of apology for such treatment to such a contributor. But—*Virginibus puerisque!* I was quite sure that Thackeray had not taken the trouble to read the story himself. Some moral deputy had read it, and disapproving no doubt properly, of the little project to which I have alluded, had incited the editor to use his authority. That Thackeray had suffered when he wrote it was easy to see, fearing that he was giving pain to one he would fain have pleased. I wrote him a long letter in return, as full of drollery as I knew how to make it. In four or five days there came a reply in the same spirit—boiling over with fun. He had kept my letter by him, not daring to open it—as he says that he did with that eligible invitation. At last he had given it to one of his girls to examine—to see whether the thorn would be too sharp, whether I had turned upon him with reproaches. A man so susceptible, so prone to work by fits and starts, so unmethodical, could not have been a good editor.

In 1862 he went into the new house which he had built for himself at Palace Green. I remember well, while this was still being built, how his friends used to discuss his imprudence in building it. Though he had done well with himself, and had made and was making a large income, was he entitled to live in a house the rent of which could not be counted at less than from five hundred to six hundred pounds a year? Before he had been there two years, he solved the question by dying—when the house was sold for two thousand pounds more than it had cost. He himself, in speaking of his project, was wont to declare that he was laying out his money in the best way he could for the interest of his children; and it turned out that he was right.

In 1863 he died in the house which he had built, and at the period of his death was writing a new novel in numbers, called *Denis Duval*. In *The Cornhill*, *The Adventures of Philip* had appeared. This new enterprise was destined for commencement on 1st January, 1864, and, though the writer was gone, it kept its promise, as far as it went. Three numbers, and what might probably have been intended for half of a fourth, appeared. It may be seen, therefore, that he by no means held to my theory, that the author should see the end of his work before the public sees the commencement. But neither did Dickens or Mrs. Gaskell, both of

whom died with stories not completed, which, when they died, were in the course of publication. All the evidence goes against the necessity of such precaution. Nevertheless, were I giving advice to a tiro in novel writing, I should recommend it.

With the last chapter of *Denis Duval* was published in the magazine a set of notes on the book, taken for the most part from Thackeray's own papers, and showing how much collateral work he had given to the fabrication of his novel. No doubt in preparing other tales, especially *Esmond*, a very large amount of such collateral labour was found necessary. He was a man who did very much of such work, delighting to deal in little historical incidents. They will be found in almost everything that he did, and I do not know that he was ever accused of gross mistakes. But I doubt whether on that account he should be called a laborious man. He could go down to Winchelsea, when writing about the little town, to see in which way the streets lay, and to provide himself with what we call local colouring. He could jot down the suggestions, as they came to his mind, of his future story. There was an irregularity in such work which was to his taste. His very notes would be delightful to read, partaking of the nature of pearls when prepared only for his own use. But he could not bring himself to sit at his desk and do an allotted task day after day. He accomplished what must be considered as quite a sufficient life's work. He had about twenty-five years for the purpose, and that which he has left is an ample produce for the time. Nevertheless he was a man of fits and starts, who, not having been in his early years drilled to method, never achieved it in his career,

He died on the day before Christmas Day, as has been said above, very suddenly, in his bed, early in the morning, in the fifty-third year of his life. To those who saw him about in the world there seemed to be no reason why he should not continue his career for the next twenty years. But those who knew him were so well aware of his constant sufferings, that, though they expected no sudden catastrophe, they were hardly surprised when it came. His death was probably caused by those spasms of which he had complained ten years before, in his letter to Mr. Reed. On the last day but one of the year, a crowd of sorrowing friends stood over his grave as he was laid to rest in Kensal Green; and, as quickly afterwards as it could be executed, a bust to his memory was put up in Westminster Abbey. It is a fine work of art, by Marochetti; but, as a likeness, is, I think, less effective than that which was modelled, and then given to the Garrick Club, by Durham, and has lately been put into marble, and now stands in the upper vestibule of the club. Neither of them, in my opinion, gives so accurate an idea of the man as a statuette in bronze, by Boehm, of which two or three copies were made. One of them is in my possession. It has been alleged, in reference to this, that there is something of a caricature in the lengthiness of the figure, in the two hands thrust into the trousers pockets, and in the protrusion of the chin. But this feeling has originated in the general idea that any face, or any

figure, not made by the artist more beautiful or more graceful than the original is an injustice. The face must be smoother, the pose of the body must be more dignified, the proportions more perfect, than in the person represented, or satisfaction is not felt. Mr. Boehm has certainly not flattered, but, as far as my eye can judge, he has given the figure of the man exactly as he used to stand before us. I have a portrait of him in crayon, by Samuel Lawrence, as like, but hardly as natural.

A little before his death Thackeray told me that he had then succeeded in replacing the fortune which he had lost as a young man. He had, in fact, done better, for he left an income of seven hundred and fifty pounds behind him.

It has been said of Thackeray that he was a cynic. This has been said so generally, that the charge against him has become proverbial. This, stated barely, leaves one or two impressions on the mind, or perhaps the two together—that this cynicism was natural to his character and came out in his life, or that it is the characteristic of his writings. Of the nature of his writings generally, I will speak in the last chapter of this little book. As to his personal character as a cynic, I must find room to quote the following first stanzas of the little poem which appeared to his memory in *Punch*, from the pen of Shirley Brooks:

He was a cynic! By his life all wrought
Of generous acts, mild words, and gentle ways,
His heart wide open to all kindly thought,
His hand so quick to give, his tongue to praise!

He was a cynic! You might read it writ
In that broad brow, crowned with its silver hair;
In those blue eyes, with childlike candour lit,
In that sweet smile his lips were wont to wear!

He was a cynic! By the love that clung
About him from his children, friends, and kin;
By the sharp pain light pen and gossip tongue
Wrought in him, chafing the soft heart within!

The spirit and nature of the man have been caught here with absolute truth. A public man should of course be judged from his public work. If he wrote as a cynic—a point which I will not discuss here—it may be fair that he who is to be known as a writer should be so called. But, as a man, I protest that it would be hard to find an individual farther removed from the character. Over and outside his fancy, which was the gift which made him so remarkable—a certain feminine softness was the most remarkable trait about him. To give some immediate pleasure was the great delight of his life—a sovereign to a schoolboy, gloves to a girl, a dinner to a man, a compliment to a woman. His charity was overflowing. His generosity excessive. I heard once a story of woe from a man who was the dear friend of both of us. The gentleman wanted a large

sum of money instantly—something under two thousand pounds—had no natural friends who could provide it, but must go utterly to the wall without it. Pondering over this sad condition of things just revealed to me, I met Thackeray between the two mounted heroes at the Horse Guards, and told him the story. "Do you mean to say that I am to find two thousand pounds?" he said, angrily, with some expletives. I explained that I had not even suggested the doing of anything—only that we might discuss the matter. Then there came over his face a peculiar smile, and a wink in his eye, and he whispered his suggestion, as though half ashamed of his meanness. "I'll go half," he said, "if anybody will do the rest." And he did go half, at a day or two's notice, though the gentleman was no more than simply a friend. I am glad to be able to add that the money was quickly repaid. I could tell various stories of the same kind, only that I lack space, and that they, if simply added one to the other, would lack interest.

He was no cynic, but he was a satirist; and could now and then be a satirist in conversation, hitting very hard when he did hit. When he was in America, he met at dinner a literary gentleman of high character, middle-aged, and most dignified deportment. The gentleman was one whose character and acquirements stood very high—deservedly so—but who in society, had that air of wrapping his toga around him, which adds, or is supposed to add, many cubits to a man's height. But he had a broken nose. At dinner he talked much of the tender passion, and did so in a manner which stirred up Thackeray's feeling of the ridiculous. "What has the world come to," said Thackeray, out loud to the table, "when two broken-nosed old fogies like you and me sit talking about love to each other!" The gentleman was astounded, and could only sit wrapping his toga in silent dismay for the rest of the evening. Thackeray then, as at other similar times, had no idea of giving pain, but when he saw a foible he put his foot upon it, and tried to stamp it out.

Such is my idea of the man whom many call a cynic, but whom I regard as one of the most soft-hearted of human beings, sweet as Charity itself, who went about the world dropping pearls, doing good, and never wilfully inflicting a wound.

CHAPTER II.

FRASER'S MAGAZINE AND PUNCH.

How Thackeray commenced his connection with *Fraser's Magazine* I am unable to say. We know how he had come to London with a view to a literary career, and that he had at one time made an attempt to earn his bread as a correspondent to a newspaper from Paris. It is probable that he became acquainted with the redoubtable Oliver Yorke, otherwise Dr. Maginn, or some of his staff, through the connection which he had thus opened with the press. He was not known, or at any rate he was unrecognised, by *Fraser* in January, 1835, in which month an amusing catalogue was given of the writers then employed, with portraits of them all seated at a symposium. I can trace no article to his pen before November, 1837, when the *Yellowplush Correspondence* was commenced, though it is hardly probable that he should have commenced with a work of so much pretension. There had been published a volume called *My Book, or the Anatomy of Conduct* by John Skelton, and a very absurd book no doubt it was. We may presume that it contained maxims on etiquette, and that it was intended to convey in print those invaluable lessons on deportment which, as Dickens has told us, were subsequently given by Mr. Turveydrop, in the academy kept by him for that purpose. Thackeray took this as his foundation for the *Fashionable Fax and Polite Annygoats*, by Jeames Yellowplush, with which he commenced those repeated attacks against snobbism which he delighted to make through a considerable portion of his literary life. Oliver Yorke has himself added four or five pages of his own to Thackeray's lucubrations; and with the second, and some future numbers, there appeared illustrations by Thackeray himself, illustrations at this time not having been common with the magazine. From all this I gather that the author was already held in estimation by *Fraser's* confraternity. I remember well my own delight with *Yellowplush* at the time, and how I inquired who was the author. It was then that I first heard Thackeray's name.

The *Yellowplush Papers* were continued through nine numbers. No further reference was made to Mr. Skelton and his book beyond that given at the beginning of the first number, and the satire is only shown by the attempt made by Yellowplush, the footman, to give his ideas generally on the manners of noble life. The idea seems to be that a gentleman may, in heart and in action, be as vul-

gar as a footman. No doubt he may, but the chances are very much that he won't. But the virtue of the memoir does not consist in the lessons, but in the general drollery of the letters. The "orthogwaphy is inaccuwate," as a certain person says in the memoirs—"so inaccuwate" as to take a positive study to "cowpwehend" it; but the joke, though old, is so handled as to be very amusing. Thackeray soon rushes away from his criticisms on snobbism to other matters. There are the details of a card-sharping enterprise, in which we cannot but feel that we recognise something of the author's own experiences in the misfortunes of Mr. Dawkins; there is the Earl of Crab's, and then the first of those attacks which he was tempted to make on the absurdities of his brethren of letters, and the only one which now has the appearance of having been ill-natured. His first victims were Dr. Dionysius Lardner and Mr. Edward Bulwer Lytton, as he was then. We can surrender the doctor to the whip of the satirist; and for "Sawedwadgeorgeearllittnbulwig," as the novelist is made to call himself, we can well believe that he must himself have enjoyed the *Yellowplush Memoirs* if he ever reread them in after-life. The speech in which he is made to dissuade the footman from joining the world of letters is so good that I will venture to insert it: "Bullwig was violently affected; a tear stood in his glistening i. 'Yellowplush,' says he, seizing my hand, 'you *are* right. Quit not your present occupation; black boots, clean knives, wear plush all your life, but don't turn literary man. Look at me. I am the first novelist in Europe. I have ranged with eagle wings over the wide regions of literature, and perched on every eminence in its turn. I have gazed with eagle eyes on the sun of philosophy, and fathomed the mysterious depths of the human mind. All languages are familiar to me, all thoughts are known to me, all men understood by me. I have gathered wisdom from the honeyed lips of Plato, as we wandered in the gardens of the academies; wisdom, too, from the mouth of Job Johnson, as we smoked our backy in Seven Dials. Such must be the studies, and such is the mission, in this world of the Poet-Philosopher. But the knowledge is only emptiness; the initiation is but misery; the initiated a man shunned and banned by his fellows. Oh!' said Bullwig, clasping his hands, and throwing his fine i's up to the chandelier, 'the curse of Pwomethus descends upon his wace. Wath and punishment pursue them from genewation to genewation! Wo to genius, the heaven-scaler, the fire-stealer! Wo and thrice-bitter desolation! Earth is the wock on which Zeus, wemorseless, stwetches his withing wictim;—men, the vultures that feed and fatten on him. Ai, ai! it is agony eternal—gwoaning and solitawy despair! And you, Yellowplush, would penetwate these mystewies; you would waise the awful veil, and stand in the twemendous Pwesence. Beware, as you value your peace, beware! Withdwaw, wash Neophyte! For heaven's sake! O for heaven's sake!'—Here he looked round with agony;—'give me a glass of bwandy-and-water, for this clawet is beginning to disagwee with me.'" It was thus that Thackeray

began that vein of satire on his contemporaries of which it may be said that the older he grew the more amusing it was, and at the same time less likely to hurt the feelings of the author satirised.

The next tale of any length from Thackeray's pen, in the magazine, was that called *Catherine*, which is the story taken from the life of a wretched woman called Catherine Hayes. It is certainly not pleasant reading, and was not written with a pleasant purpose. It assumes to have come from the pen of Ikey Solomon, of Horsemonger Lane, and its object is to show how disgusting would be the records of thieves, cheats, and murderess, if their doings and language were described according to their nature. instead of being handled in such a way as to create sympathy, and therefore imitation. Bulwer's *Eugene Aram*, Harrison Ainsworth's *Jack Sheppard*, and Dickens' Nancy were in his mind, and it was thus that he preached his sermon against the selection of such heroes and heroines bythe novelists of the day. "Be it granted," he says, in his epilogue "Solomon is dull; but don't attack his morality. He humbly submits that, in his poem, no man shall mistake virtue for vice, no, man shall allow a single sentiment of pity or admiration to enter his bosom for any character in the poem, it being from beginning to end a scene of unmixed rascality, performed by persons who never deviate into good feeling." The intention is intelligible enough, but such a story neither could have been written nor read—certainly not written by Thackeray, nor read by the ordinary reader of a first-class magazine—had he not been enabled to adorn it by infinite wit. Captain Brock, though a brave man, is certainly not described as an interesting or gallant soldier; but he is possessed of great resources. Captain Macshane, too, is a thorough blackguard; but he is one with a dash of loyalty about him, so that the reader can almost sympathise with him, and is tempted to say that Ikey Solomon has not quite kept his promise

Catherine appeared in 1839 and 1840. In the latter of those years *The Shabby Genteel* story also came out. Then, in 1841, there followed *The History of Samuel Titmarsh and the Great Hoggarty Diamond*, illustrated by Samuel's cousin, Michael Angelo. But though so announced in *Fraser*, there were no illustrations, and those attached to the story in later editions are not taken from sketches by Thackeray. This, as far as I know, was the first use of the name Titmarsh, and seems to indicate some intention on the part of the author of creating a hoax as to two personages—one the writer and the other the illustrator. If it were so, he must soon have dropped the idea. In the last paragraph he has shaken off his cousin Michael. The main object of the story is to expose the villany of bubble companies, and the danger they run who venture to have dealings with city matters which they do not understand. I cannot but think that he altered his mind and changed his purpose while he was writing it, actuated probably by that editorial monition as to its length.

In 1842 were commenced *The Confessions of George Fitz-Boodle*, which were continued into 1843. I do not think that they

attracted much attention, or that they have become peculiarly popular since. They are supposed to contain the reminiscences of a younger son, who moans over his poverty, complains of womankind generally, laughs at the world all round, and interspurses his pages with one or two excellent ballads. I quote one, written for the sake of affording a parody, with the parody along with it, because the two together give so strong an example of the condition of Thackeray's mind in regard to literary products. The "humbug" of everything, the pretence, the falseness of affected sentiment, the remoteness of poetical pathos from the true condition of the average minds of men and women, struck him so strongly, that he sometimes allowed himself almost to feel—or at any rate, to say—that poetical expression, as being above nature, must be unnatural. He had declared to himself that all humbug was odious, and should be by him laughed down to the extent of his capacity. His Yellowplush, his Catherine Hayes, his Fitz-Boodle, his Barry Lyndon, and Becky Sharp, with many others of this kind, were all invented and treated for this purpose and after this fashion. I shall have to say more on the same subject when I come to *The Snob Papers*. In this instance he wrote a very pretty ballad, *The Willow Tree*—so good that if left by itself it would create no idea of absurdity or extravagant pathos in the mind of the ordinary reader—simply that he might render his own work absurd by his own parody.

THE WILLOW-TREE.

No. I.

Know ye the willow-tree,
  Whose gray leaves quiver,
Whispering gloomily
  To yon pale river?
Lady, at eventide
  Wander not near it!
They say its branches hide
  A sad lost spirit!

Once to the willow-tree
  A maid came fearful,
Pale seemed her cheek to be,
  Her blue eye tearful.
Soon as she saw the tree,
  Her steps moved fleeter,
No one was there—ah me!—
  No one to meet her!

Quick beat her heart to hear
  The far bells' chime
Toll from the chapel tower
  The trysting-time.

THE WILLOW-TREE

No. II.

Long by the willow-tree
  Vainly they sought her,
Wild rang the mother's screams
  O'er the gray water.
"Where is my lovely one?
  Where is my daughter?

Rouse thee, sir constable—
  Rouse thee and look.
Fisherman, bring your net,
  Boatman, yoor hook.
Beat in the lily-beds,
  Dive in the brook."

Vainly the constable
  Shouted and called her.
Vainly the fisherman
  Beat the green alder.
Vainly he threw the net.
  Never it hauled her!

Mother beside the fire
  Sat, her night-cap in;

But the red sun went down
In golden flame,
And though she looked around,
Yet no one came!

Presently came the night,
Sadly to greet her—
Moon in her silver light,
Stars in their glitter.
Then sank the moon away
Under the billow.
Still wept the maid alone—
There by the willow!

Through the long darkness,
By the stream rolling,
Hour after hour went on
Tolling and tolling.
Long was the darkness,
Lonely and stilly.
Shrill came the night wind,
Piercing and chilly.

Shrill blew the morning breeze,
Biting and cold.
Bleak peers the gray dawn
Over the wold!
Bleak over moor and stream
Looks the gray dawn,
Gray with dishevelled hair.
Still stands the willow there—
The maid is gone!

Domine, Domine!
Sing we a litany—
Sing for poor maiden hearts
broken and weary;
Sing we a litany,
Wail we and weep we a
wild miserere!

Father in easy-chair,
Gloomily napping;
When at the window-sill
Came a light tapping.

And a pale countenance
Looked through the casement
Loud beat the mother's heart
Sick with amazement,
And at the vision which
Came to surprise her!
Shrieking in an agony—
"Lor'! it's Elizar!"

Yes, 'twas Elizabeth;—
Yes, 'twas their girl:
Pale was her cheek, and her
hair out of curl.
"Mother!" the loved one,
Blushing exclaimed,
"Let not your innocent
Lizzy be blamed.

Yesterday, going to Aunt
Jones's to tea,
Mother, dear mother, I
Forgot the door-key!
And as the night was cold,
And the way steep,
Mrs. Jones kept me to
Breakfast and sleep."

Whether her pa and ma
Fully believed her,
That we shall never know.
Stern they received her;
And for the work of that
Cruel, though short, night—
Sent her to bed without
Tea for a fortnight.

MORAL.

Hey diddle diddlety,
Cat and the fiddlety,
Maidens of England take
caution by she!
Let love and suicide
Never tempt you aside,
And always remember to take
the door-key!

Mr. George Fitz-Boodle gave his name to other narratives beyond his own *Confessions*. A series of stories was carried on by him in *Fraser* called, *Men's Wives*, containing three: *Ravenwing*,

Mr. and Mrs. Frank Berry and *Dennis Hoggarty's Wife.* The first chapter in *Mr. and Mrs. Frank Berry* describes "The Fight at Slaughter House." Slaughter House, as Mr. Venables reminded us in the last chapter, was near Smithfield, in London—the school which afterwards became Grey Friars; and the fight between Biggs and Berry is the record of one which took place in the flesh when Thackeray was at the Charter House. But Mr. Fitz-Boodle's name was afterwards attached to a greater work than these, to a work so great that subsequent editors have thought him to be unworthy of the honour. In the January number, 1844, of *Fraser's Magazine* are commenced the *Memoirs of Barry Lyndon*, and the authorship is attributed to Mr. Fitz-Boodle. The title given in the magazine was *The Luck of Barry Lyndon: a Romance of the last Century.* By Fitz-Boodle. In the collected edition of Thackeray's works the *Memoirs* are given as "Written by himself," and were, I presume, so brought out by Thackeray, after they had appeared in *Fraser.* Why Mr. George Fitz-Boodle should have been robbed of so great an honour I do not know.

In imagination, language, construction, and general literary capacity, Thackeray never did anything more remarkable than *Barry Lyndon.* I have quoted the words which he put into the mouth of Ikey Solomon, declaring that in the story which he has there told he has created nothing but disgust for the wicked characters he has produced, and that he has "used his humble endeavours to cause the public also to hate them." Here, in *Barry Lyndon*, he has, probably unconsciously, acted in direct opposition to his own principles. Barry Lyndon is as great a scoundrel as the mind of man ever conceived. He is one who might have taken as his motto Satan's words: "Evil, be thou my good." And yet his story is so written that it is almost impossible not to entertain something of a friendly feeling for him. He tells his own adventures as a card-sharper, bully, and liar; as a heartless wretch, who had neither love nor gratitude in his composition; who had no sense even of loyalty; who regarded gambling as the highest occupation to which a man could devote himself, and fraud as always justified by success; a man possessed by all meannesses except cowardice. And the reader is so carried away by his frankness and energy as almost to rejoice when he succeeds, and to grieve with him when he is brought to the ground.

The man is perfectly satisfied as to the reasonableness—I might almost say, as to the rectitude—of his own conduct throughout. He is one of a decayed Irish family, that could boast of good blood. His father had obtained possession of the remnants of the property by turning Protestant, thus ousting the elder brother, who later on becomes his nephew's confederate in gambling. The elder brother is true to the old religion, and as the law stood in the last century, the younger brother, by changing his religion, was able to turn him out. Barry, when a boy, learns the slang and the gait of the debauched gentlemen of the day. He is specially proud of being a gentleman by birth and manners. He had been kidnapped, and made to serve as a common soldier, but boasts that he

was at once fit for the occasion when enabled to show as a court gentleman. "I came to it at once," he says, "and as if I had never done anything else all my life. I had a gentleman to wait upon me, a French *friseur* to dress my hair of a morning. I knew the taste of chocolate as by intuition almost, and could distinguish between the right Spanish and the French before I had been a week in my new position. I had rings on all my fingers and watches in both my fobs—canes, trinkets, and snuff-boxes of all sorts. I had the finest natural taste for lace and china of any man I ever knew."

To dress well, to wear a sword with a grace, to carry away his plunder with affected indifference, and to appear to be equally easy when he loses his last ducat, to be agreeable to women, and to look like a gentleman—these are his accomplishments. In one place he rises to the height of a grand professor in the art of gambling, and gives his lessons with almost a noble air. "Play grandly, honorably. Be not, of course, cast down at losing; but above all, be not eager at winning, as mean souls are." And he boasts of his accomplishments with so much eloquence as to make the reader sure that he believes in them. He is quite pathetic over himself, and can describe with heartrending words the evils that befall him when others use against him successfully any of the arts which he practises himself.

The marvel of the book is not so much that the hero should evidently think well of himself, as that the author should so tell his story as to appear to be altogether on the hero's side. In *Catherine*, the horrors described are most truly disgusting—so much that the story, though very clever, is not pleasant reading. The *Memoirs of Barry Lyndon* are very pleasant to read. There is nothing to shock or disgust. The style of narrative is exactly that which might be used as to the exploits of a man whom the author intended to represent as deserving of sympathy and praise—so that the reader is almost brought to sympathise. But I should be doing an injustice to Thackeray if I were to leave an impression that he had taught lessons tending to evil practice, such as he supposed to have been left by *Jack Sheppard* or *Eugene Aram*. No one will be tempted to undertake the life of a *chevalier d'industrie* by reading the book, or be made to think that cheating at cards is either an agreeable or a profitable profession. The following is excellent as a tirade in favour of gambling, coming from Redmond de Balibari, as he came to be called during his adventures abroad, but it will hardly persuade anyone to be a gambler:

"We always played on parole with anybody—any person, that is, of honor and noble lineage. We never pressed for our winnings, or declined to receive promissory notes in lieu of gold. But woe to the man that did not pay when the note became due! Redmond de Balibari was sure to wait upon him with his bill, and I promise you there were very few bad debts. On the contrary, gentlemen were grateful to us for our forbearance, and our character for honour stood unimpeached. In latter times, a vulgar national prejudice has chosen to cast a slur upon the character of men of honour

engaged in the profession of play; but I speak of the good old days of Europe, before the cowardice of the French aristocracy (in the shameful revolution, which served them right) brought discredit upon our order. They cry fie now upon men engaged in play; but I should like to know how much more honourable *their* modes of livelihood are than ours. The broker of the Exchange, who bulls and bears, and buys and sells, and dabbles with lying loans, and trades upon state-secrets—what is he but a gamester? The merchant who deals in teas and tallow, is he any better? His bales of dirty indigo are his dice, his cards come up every year instead of every ten minutes, and the sea is his green-table. You call the profession of the law an honourable one, where a man will lie for any bidder—lie down poverty for the sake of a fee from wealth; lie down right because wrong is in his brief. You call a doctor an honorable man—a swindling quack who does not believe in the nostrums which he prescribes, and takes your guinea for whispering in your ear that it is a fine morning. And yet, forsooth, a gallant man, who sits him down before the baize and challenges all comers, his money against theirs, his fortune against theirs, is proscribed by your modern moral world! It is a conspiracy of the middle-class against gentlemen. It is only the shopkeeper cant which is to go down nowadays. I say that play was an institution of chivalry. It has been wrecked along with other privileges of men of birth. When Seingalt engaged a man for six-and-thirty hours without leaving the table, do you think he showed no courage? How have we had the best blood, and the brightest eyes too, of Europe throbbing round the table, as I and my uncle have held the cards and the bank against some terrible player, who was matching some thousands out of his millions against our all, which was there on the baize! When we engaged that daring Alexis Kossloffsky, and won seven thousand louis on a single coup, had we lost we should have been beggars the next day; when *he* lost, he was only a village and a few hundred serfs in pawn the worse. When at Toeplitz the Duke of Courland brought fourteen lacqueys, each with foar bags of florins, and challenged our bank to play against the sealed bags, what did we ask? 'Sir,' said we, 'we' have but eighty thousand florins in bank, or two hundred thousand at three months. If your highness's bags do not contain more than eighty thousand we will meet you.' And we did; and after eleven hours' play in which our bank was at one time reduced to two hundred and three ducats, we won seventeen thousand florins of him. Is *this* not something like boldness? Does this profession not require skill, and perseverance, and bravery? Four crowned heads looked on at the game, and an imperial princess, when I turned up the ace of hearts and made Paroli, burst into tears. No man on the European Continent held a higher position than Redmond Barry then; and when the Duke of Courland lost, he was pleased to say that we had won nobly. And so we had, and spent nobly what we won." This is very grand, and is put as an eloquent man would put it who really wished to defend gambling.

The rascal, of course, comes to a miserable end, but the tone of the narrative is continued throughout. He is brought to live at last with his old mother in the Fleet prison, on a wretched annuity of fifty pounds per annum, which she has saved out of the general wreck, and there he dies of delirium tremens. For an assumed tone of continued irony, maintained through the long memoir of a life, never becoming tedious, never unnatural, astounding us rather by its naturalness, I know nothing equal to *Barry Lyndon*.

As one reads, one sometimes is struck by a conviction that this or the other writer has thoroughly liked the work on which he is engaged. There is a gusto about his passages, a liveliness in the language, a spring in the motion of the words, an eagerness of description, a lilt, if I may so call it, in the progress of the narrative, which makes the reader feel that the author has himself greatly enjoyed what he has written. He has evidently gone on with his work without any sense of weariness or doubt; and the words have come readily to him. So it has been with *Barry Lyndon*. "My mind was filled full with those blackguards," Thackeray once said to a friend. It is easy enough to see that it was so. In the passage which I have above quoted, his mind was running over with the idea that a rascal might be so far gone in rascality as to be in love with his own trade.

This was the last of Thackeray's long stories in *Fraser*. I have given by no means a complete catalogue of his contributions to the magazine, but I have perhaps mentioned those which are best known. There were many short pieces which have now been collected in his works, such as *Little Travels and Roadside Sketches*, and the *Carmen Lilliense*, in which the poet is supposed to be detained at Lille by want of money. There are others which I think are not to be found in the collected works, such as a *Box of Novels by Titmarsh*, and *Titmarsh in the Picture Galleries*. After the name of Titmarsh had been once assumed it was generally used in the papers which he sent to *Fraser*.

Thackeray's connection with *Punch* began in 1843, and, as far as I can learn, *Miss Tickletoby's Lectures on English History* was his first contribution. They, however, have not been found worthy of a place in the collected edition. His short pieces during a long period of his life were so numerous that to have brought them all together would have weighted his more important works with two great an amount of extraneous matter. The same lady, Miss Tickletoby, gave a series of lectures. There was *The History of the next French Revolution*, and *The Wanderings of our Fat Contributor*—the first of which is, and the latter is not, perpetuated in his works. Our old friend Jeames Yellowplush, or De la Pluche—for we cannot for a moment doubt that he is the same Jeames—is very prolific, and as excellent in his orthography, his sense, and satire, as ever. These papers began with *The Lucky Speculator*. He lives in The Albany; he hires a brougham; and is devoted to Miss Emily Flimsey, the daughter of Sir George, who had been his master—to the great injury of poor Maryanne,

the fellow-servant who had loved him in his kitchen days. Then there follows that wonderful ballad, *Jeames of Backley Square*. Upon this he writes an angry letter to *Punch*, dated from his chambers in The Albany: "Has a regular suscriber to your amusing paper, I beg leaf to state that I should never have done so had I supposed that it was your 'abbit to igspose the mistaries of privit life, and to hinger the delligit feelings of umble individyouls like myself." He writes in his own defence, both as to Maryanne and to the share-dealing by which he had made his fortune; and he ends with declaring his right to the position which he holds. "You are correct in stating that I am of hancient Normin fam'ly. This is more than Peal can say, to whomb I applied for a barnetcy; but the primmier being of low igstraction, natrally stikles for his horder." And the letter is signed "Fitzjames De la Pluche." Then follows his diary, beginning with a description of the way in which he rushed into *Punch's* office, declaring his misfortunes, when losses had come upon him. "I wish to be paid for my contribewtions to your paper. Suckmstances is altered with me." Whereupon he gets a cheque upon Messrs. Pump and Aldgate, and has himself carried away to new speculations. He leaves his diary behind him, and *Punch* surreptitiously publishes it. There is much in the diary which comes from Thackeray's very heart. Who does not remember his indignation against Lord Bareacres? "I gave the old humbug a few shares out of my own pocket. 'There, old Pride,' says I, 'I like to see you down on your knees to a footman. There, old Pomposity! Take fifty pounds. I like to see you come cringing and begging for it!' Whenever I see him in a very public place, I take my change for my money. I digg him in the ribs, or clap his padded old shoulders. I call him 'Bareacres, my old brick,' and I see him wince. It does my 'art good." It does Thackeray's heart good to pour himself out in indignation against some imaginary Bareacres. He blows off his steam with such an eagerness that he forgets for a time, or nearly forgets, his cacography. Then there are "Jeames on Time Bargings," "Jeames on the Guage Question," "Mr. Jeames again." Of all our author's heroes Jeames is perhaps the most amusing. There is not much in that joke of bad spelling, and we should have been inclined to say beforehand, that Mrs. Malaprop had done it so well and so sufficiently, that no repetition of it would be received with great favour. Like other dishes, it depends upon the cooking. Jeames, with his "suckmstances," high or low, will be immortal.

There were *The Travels in London*, a long series of them; and then *Punches Prize Novelists*, in which Thackeray imitates the language and plots of Bulwer, Disraeli, Charles Lever, G. P. R. James, Mrs. Gore, and Cooper, the American. They are all excellent; perhaps Codlingsby is the best. Mendoza, when he is fighting with the bargeman, or drinking with Codlingsby, or receiving Louis Philippe in his rooms, seems to have come direct from the pen of our Premier. Phil Fogerty's jump, and the younger and the elder

horsemen, as they come riding into the story, one in his armour and the other with his feathers, have the very savour and tone of Lever and James; but then the savour and the tone are not so piquant. I know nothing in the way of imitation to equal Codlingsby, if it be not The Tale of Drury Lane, by W. S. in the *Rejected Addresses*, of which it is said that Walter Scott declared that he must have written it himself. The scene between Dr. Franklin, Louis XVI., Marie Antoinette, and Tatua, the chief of the Nose-rings, as told in *The Stars and Stripes*, is perfect in its way, but it fails as being a caricature of Cooper. The Caricaturist has been carried away beyond and above his model, by his own sense of fun.

Of the ballads which appeared in *Punch* I will speak elsewhere, as I must give a separate short chapter to our author's power of versification; but I must say a word of *The Snob Papers*, which were at the time the most popular and the best known of all Thackeray's contributions to *Punch*. I think that perhaps they were more charming, more piquant, more apparently true, when they came out one after another in the periodical, than they are now as collected together. I think that one at a time would be better than many. And I think that the first half in the long list of snobs would have been more manifestly snobs to us than they are now with the second half of the list appended. In fact, there are too many of them, till the reader is driven to tell himself that the meaning of it all is that Adam's family is from first to last a family of snobs. "First," says Thackeray, in preface, "the world was made; then as a matter of course, snobs; they existed for years and years, and were no more known than America. But presently—ingens patebat tellus—the people became darkly aware that there was such a race. Not above five-and-twenty years since, a name, an expressive monosyllable, arose to designate that case. That name has spread over England like railroads subsequently; snobs are known and recognised throughout an empire on which I am given to understand the sun never sets. *Punch* appears at the right season to chronicle their history; and the individual comes forth to write that history in *Punch*.

"I have—and for this gift I congratulate myself with a deep and abiding thankfulness—an eye for a snob. If the truthful is the beautiful, it is beautiful to study even the snobbish—to track snobs through history as certain little dogs in Hampshire hunt out truffles; to sink shafts in society, and come upon rich veins of snob-ore. Snobbishness is like Death, in a quotation from Horace, which I hope you never heard, 'beating with equal foot at poor men's doors, and kicking at the gates of emperors.' It is a great mistake to judge of snobs lightly, and think they exist among the lower classes merely. An immense percentage of snobs, I believe, is to be found in every rank of this mortal life. You must not judge hastily or vulgarly of snobs; to do so shows that you are yourself a snob. I myself have been taken for one."

The state of Thackeray's mind when he commenced his delinea-

tions of snobbery is here accurately depicted. Written, as these papers were, for *Punch*, and written, as they were, by Thackeray, it was a necessity that every idea put forth should be given as a joke, and that the satire on society in general should be wrapped up in burlesque absurdity. But not the less eager and serious was his intention. When he tells us, at the end of the first chapter, of a certain Colonel Snobley, whom he met at "Bagnigge Wells," as he says, and with whom he was so disgusted that he determined to drive the man out of the house, we are well aware that he had met an offensive military gentleman—probably at Tunbridge. Gentlemen thus offensive, even though tamely offensive, were peculiarly offensive to him. We presume, by what follows, that this gentleman, ignorantly—for himself most unfortunately—spoke of Pubicōla. Thackeray was disgusted—disgusted that such a name should be lugged into ordinary conversation at all, and then that a man should talk about a name with which he was so little acquainted as not to know how to pronounce it. The man was therefore a snob, and ought to be put down; in all which I think that Thackeray was unnecessarily hard on the man, and gave him too much importance.

So it was with him in his whole intercourse with snobs—as he calls them. He saw something that was distasteful, and a man instantly became a snob in his estimation. "But you *can* draw," a man once said to him, there having been some discussion on the subject of Thackeray's art powers. The man meant no doubt to be civil, but meant also to imply that for the purpose needed the drawing was good enough—a matter on which he was competent to form an opinion. Thackeray instantly put the man down as a snob for flattering him. The little courtesies of the world and the little discourtesies became snobbish to him. A man could not wear his hat, or carry his umbrella, or mount his horse, without falling into some error of snobbism before his hypercritical eyes. St. Michael would have carried his armour amiss, and St. Cecilia have been snobbish as she twanged her harp.

I fancy that a policeman considers that every man in the street would be properly "run in," if only all the truth about the man had been known. The tinker thinks that every pot is unsound. The cobbler doubts the stability of every shoe. So at last it grew to be the case with Thackeray. There was more hope that the city should be saved because of its ten just men, than for society, if society were to depend on ten who were not snobs. All this arose from the keenness of his vision into that which was really mean. But that keenness became so aggravated by the intenseness of his search that the slightest speck of dust became to his eyes as a foul stain. Publicōla, as we saw, damned one poor man to a wretched immortality, and another was called pitilessly over the coals because he had mixed a grain of flattery with a bushel of of truth. Thackeray tells us that he was born to hunt out snobs, as certain dogs are trained to find truffles. But we can imagine that a dog, very energetic at producing truffles, and not finding them as plentiful as his heart desired, might occasionally produce

roots which were not genuine—might be carried on in his energies till to his senses every fungus-root became a truffle. I think that there has been something of this with our author's snob-hunting, and that his zeal was at last greater than his discrimination.

The nature of the task which came upon him made this fault almost unavoidable. When a hit is made, say with a piece at a theatre, or with a set of illustrations, or with a series of papers on this or the other subject—when something of this kind has suited the taste of the moment, and gratified the public, there is a natural inclination on the part of those who are interested to continue that which has been found to be good. It pays and it pleases, and it seems to suit everybody. Then it is continued usque ad nauseam, We see it in everything. When the king said he liked partridges, partridges were served to him every day. The world was pleased with certain ridiculous portraits of its big men. The big men were soon used up, and the little men had to be added.

We can imagine that even *Punch* may occasionally be at a loss for subjects wherewith to delight its readers. In fact, *The Snob Papers* were too good to be brought to an end, and therefore there were forty-five of them. A dozen would have been better. As he himself says in his last paper, "for a mortal year we have been together flattering and abusing the human race." It was exactly that. Of course we know—everybody always knows—that a bad specimen of his order may be found in every division of society. There may be a snob king, a snob parson, a snob member of parliament, a snob grocer, tailor, goldsmith, and the like. But that is not what has been meant. We did not want a special satirist to tell us what we all knew before. Had snobbishness been divided for us into its various attributes and characteristics, rather than attributed to various classes, the end sought—the exposure, namely, of the evil—would have been better attained. The snobbishness of flattery, of falsehood, of cowardice, lying, time-serving, money-worship, would have been perhaps attacked to a better purpose than that of kings, priests, soldiers, merchants, or men of letters. The assault as made by Thackeray seems to have been made on the profession generally.

The paper on clerical snobs is intended to be essentially generous, and is ended by an allusion to certain old clerical friends which has a sweet tone of tenderness in it. "How should he who knows you, not respect you or your calling? May this pen never write a pennyworth again if it ever casts ridicule upon either." But in the mean time he has thrown his stone at the covetousness of bishops, because of certain Irish prelates who died rich many years before he wrote. The insinuation is that bishops generally take more of the loaves and fishes than they ought, whereas the fact is that bishops' incomes are generally so insufficient for the requirements demanded of them, that a feeling prevails that a clergyman to be fit for a bishopric should have a private income. He attacks the snobbishness of the universities, showing us how one class of young men consists of fellow-commoners, who wear

lace and drink wine with their meals, and another class consists of sizars, or servitors, who wear badges, as being poor, and are never allowed to take their food with their fellow-students. That arrangements fit for past times are not fit for these is true enough. Consequently, they should gradually be changed, and from day to day are changed. But there is no snobbishness in this. Was the fellow-commoner a snob when he acted in accordance with the custom of his rank and standing? or the sizar who accepted aid in achieving that education which he could not have got without it? or the tutor of the college, who carried out the rules entrusted to him? There are two military snobs, Rag and Famish. One is a swindler, and the other a debauched young idiot. No doubt they are both snobs, and one has been, while the other is, an officer. But there is, I think, not an unfairness so much as an absence of intuition, in attaching to soldiers especially two vices to which all classes are open. Rag was a gambling snob, and Famish a drunken snob; but they were not specially military snobs. There is a chapter devoted to dinner-giving snobs, in which I think the doctrine laid down will not hold water, and therefore that the snobbism imputed is not proved. "Your usual style of meal," says the satirist—"that is plenteous, comfortable, and in its perfection—should be that to which you welcome your friends." Then there is something said about the "Brummagem plate pomp," and we are told that it is right that dukes should give grand dinners, but that we—of the middle class—should entertain our friends with the simplicity which is customary with us. In all this there is, I think, a mistake. The duke gives a grand dinner because he thinks his friends will like it; sitting down when alone with the duchess, we may suppose, with a retinue and grandeur less than that which is arrayed for gala occasions. So is it with Mr. Jones, who is no snob because he provides a costly dinner—if he can afford it. He does it because he thinks his friends will like it. It may be that the grand dinner is a bore—and that the leg of mutton, with plenty of gravy and potatoes all hot, would be nicer. I generally prefer the leg of mutton myself. But I do not think that snobbery is involved in the other. A man, no doubt, may be a snob in giving a dinner. I am not a snob because for the occasion I eke out my own dozen silver forks with plated ware; but if I make believe that my plated ware is true silver, then I am a snob.

In that matter of association with our betters—we will for the moment presume that gentlemen and ladies with titles or great wealth are our betters—great and delicate questions arise as to what is snobbery and what is not, in speaking of which Thackeray becomes very indignant, and explains the intensity of his feelings as thoroughly by a charming little picture as by his words. It is a picture of Queen Elizabeth as she is about to trample with disdain on the coat which that snob Raleigh is throwing for her use on the mud before her. This is intended to typify the low parasite nature of the Englishman which has been described in the previous page or

two. "And of these calm moralists '—it matters not for our present purpose who were the moralists in question—"is there one, I wonder, whose heart would not throb with pleasure if he could be seen walking arm-in-arm with a couple of dukes down Pall Mall? No; it is impossible, in our condition of society, not to be sometimes a snob." And again:—"How should it be otherwise in a country where lordolatry is part of our creed, and where our children are brought up to respect the 'Peerage' as the Englishman's second Bible?" Then follows the wonderfully graphic picture of Queen Elizabeth and Raleigh.

In all this Thackeray has been carried away from the truth by his hatred for a certain meanness of which there are no doubt examples enough. As for Raleigh, I think we have always sympathised with the young man, instead of despising him, because he felt on the impulse of the moment that nothing was too good for the woman and the queen combined. The idea of getting something in return for his cloak could hardly have come so quick to him as that impulse in favour of royalty and womanhood. If one of us to-day should see the queen passing, would he not raise his hat, and assume, unconsciously, something of an altered demeanour because of his reverence for majesty? In doing so he would have no mean desire of getting anything. The throne and its occupant are to him honourable, and he honours them. There is surely no greater mistake than to suppose that reverence is snobbishness. I meet a great man in the street, and some chance having brought me to his knowledge, he stops and says a word to me. Am I a snob because I feel myself to be graced by his notice? Surely not. And if his acquaintance goes further and he asks me to dinner, am I not entitled so far to think well of myself because I have been found worthy of his society?

They who have raised themselves in the world, and they, too, whose position has enabled them to receive all that estimation can give, all that society can furnish, all that intercourse with the great can give, are more likely to be pleasant companions than they who have been less fortunate. That picture of two companion dukes in Pall Mall is too gorgeous for human eye to endure. A man would be scorched to cinders by so much light, as he would be crushed by a sack of sovereigns even though he might be allowed to have them if he could carry them away. But there can be no doubt that a peer taken at random as a companion would be preferable to a clerk from a counting-house—taken at random. The clerk might turn out a scholar on your hands, and the peer no better than a poor spendthrift; but the chances are the other way.

A tuft-hunter is a snob, a parasite is a snob, the man who allows the manhood within him to be awed by a coronet is a snob. The man who worships mere wealth is a snob. But so also is he who, in fear lest he should be called a snob, is afraid to seek the acquaintance—or if it come to speak of the acquaintance—of those whose acquaintance is manifestly desirable. In all this I feel that

Thackeray was carried beyond the truth by his intense desire to put down what is mean.

It is in truth well for us all to know what constitutes snobbism, and I think that Thackeray, had he not been driven to dilution and dilatation, could have told us. If you will keep your hands from picking and stealing, and your tongue from evil speaking, lying, and slandering, you will not be a snob. The lesson seems to be simple, and perhaps a little trite, but if you look into it, it will be found to contain nearly all that is necessary.

But the excellence of each individual picture as it is drawn is not the less striking because there may be found some fault with the series as a whole. What can excel the telling of the story of Captain Shindy at his club—which is, I must own, as true as it is graphic? Captain Shindy is a real snob. "'Look at it, sir; is it cooked? Smell it, sir. Is it meat fit for a gentleman?' he roars out to the steward, who stands trembling before him, and who in vain tells him that the Bishop of Bullocksmithy has just had three from the same loin." The telling as regards Captain Shindy is excellent, but the sidelong attack upon the episcopate is cruel. "All the waiters in the club are huddled round the captain's mutton-chop. He roars out the most horrible curses at John for not bringing the pickles. He utters the most dreadful oaths because Thomas has not arrived with the Harvey sauce. Peter comes tumbling with the water-jug over Jeames, who is bringing the 'glittering canisters with bread.'

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"Poor Mrs. Shindy and the children are, meanwhile, in dingy lodgings somewhere, waited upon by a charity girl in pattens."

The visit to Castle Carabas, and the housekeeper's description of the wonders of the family mansion, is as good. "'The Side Entrance and 'All,' says the housekeeper. 'The halligator hover the mantelpiece was brought home by Hadmiral St. Michaels, when a capting with Lord Hanson. The harms on the cheers is the harms of the Carabas family. The great 'all is seventy feet in lenth, fifty-six in breath, and thirty-eight feet 'igh. The carvings of the chimlies, representing the buth or Venus and 'Ercules and 'Eyelash, is by Van Chislum, the most famous sculpture of his hage and country. The ceiling, by Calimanco, represents Painting, Harchitecture, and Music—the naked female figure with the barrel-organ—introducing George, first Lord Carabas, to the Temple of the Muses. The winder ornaments is by Vanderputty. The floor is Patagonian marble; and the chandelier in the centre was presented to Lionel, second marquis, by Lewy the Sixteenth, whose 'ead was cut hoff in the French Revolution. We now henter the South Gallery," etc., etc. All of which is very good fun, with a dash of truth in it also as to the snobbery—only in this it will be necessary to be quite sure where the snobbery lies. If my Lord Carabas has a "buth of Venus," beautiful for all eyes to see, there is no snobbery, only good-nature, in the showing it; nor is there snobbery in going to see it, if a beautiful "buth of Venus" has

charms for you. If you merely want to see the inside of a lord's house, and the lord is puffed up with the pride of showing his, then there will be two snobs.

Of all those papers it may be said that each has that quality of a pearl about it which in the previous chapter I endeavoured to explain. In each some little point is made in excellent language, so as to charm by its neatness, incision, and drollery. But *The Snob Papers* had better be read separately, and not taken in the lump.

Thackeray ceased to write for *Punch* in 1852, either entirely or almost so.

CHAPTER III.

VANITY FAIR.

SOMETHING has been said, in the biographical chapter, of the way in which *Vanity Fair* was produced, and of the period in the author's life in which it was written. He had become famous—to a limited extent—by the exquisite nature of his contributions to periodicals; but he desired to do something larger, something greater, something, perhaps, less ephemeral. For though *Barry Lyndon* and others have not proved to be ephemeral, it was thus that he regarded them. In this spirit he went to work and wrote *Vanity Fair*.

It may be as well to speak first of the faults which were attributed to it. It was said that the good people were all fools, and that the clever people were all knaves. When the critics—the talking critics as well as the writing critics—began to discuss *Vanity Fair*, there had already grown up a feeling as to Thackeray as an author—that he was one who had taken up the business of castigating the vices of the world. Scott had dealt with the heroics, whether displayed in his Flora MacIvors or Meg Merilieses, in his Ivanhoes or Ochiltrees. Miss Edgeworth had been moral; Miss Austen conventional; Bulwer had been poetical and sentimental; Marryatt and Lever had been funny and pugnacious, always with a dash of gallantry, displaying funny naval and funny military life; and Dickens had already become great in painting the virtues of the lower orders. But by all these some kind of virtue had been sung, though it might be only the virtue of riding a horse or fighting a duel. Even Eugene Aram and Jack Sheppard, with whom Thackeray found so much fault, were intended to be fine fellows, though they broke into houses and committed murders. The primary object of all those writers was to create an interest by exciting sympathy. To enhance our sympathy personages were introduced who were very vile indeed—as Bucklaw, in the guise of a lover, to heighten our feelings for Ravenswood and Lucy; as Wild, as a thief-taker, to make us more anxious for the saving of Jack; as Ralph Nickleby, to pile up the pity for his niece Kate. But each of these novelists might have appropriately begun with an *Arma virumque cano*. The song was to be of something godlike—even with a Peter Simple. With Thackeray it had been altogether different. Alas, alas! the meanness of human wishes; the poorness of human results! That had been his tone. There can be no

doubt that the heroic had appeared contemptible to him, as being untrue. The girl who had deceived her papa and mamma seemed more probable to him than she who perished under the willow-tree from sheer love—as given in the last chapter. Why sing songs that are false? Why tell of Lucy Ashtons and Kate Nicklebys, when pretty girls, let them be ever so beautiful, can be silly and sly? Why pour philosophy out of the mouth of a fashionable young gentleman like Pelham, seeing that young gentlemen of that sort rarely, or we may say never, talk after that fashion? Why make a house-breaker a gallant charming young fellow, the truth being that house-breakers as a rule are as objectionable in their manners as they are in their morals? Thackeray's mind had in truth worked in this way, and he had become a satirist. That had been all very well for *Fraser* and *Punch;* but when his satire was continued through a long novel, in twenty-four parts, readers—who do in truth like the heroic better than the wicked—began to declare that this writer was no novelist, but only a cynic.

Thence the question arises what a novel should be—which I will endeavour to discuss very shortly in a later chapter. But this special fault was certainly found with *Vanity Fair* at the time. Heroines should not only be beautiful, but should be endowed also with a quasi celestial grace—grace of dignity, propriety, and reticence. A heroine should hardly want to be married, the arrangement being almost too mundane—and, should she be brought to consent to undergo such bond, because of its acknowledged utility, it should be at some period so distant as hardly to present itself to the mind as a reality. Eating and drinking should be altogether indifferent to her, and her clothes should be picturesque rather than smart, and that from accident rather than design. Thackeray's Amelia does not at all come up to the description here given. She is proud of having a lover, constantly declaring to herself and to others that he is "the greatest and the best of men"—whereas the young gentleman is, in truth, a very little man. She is not at all indifferent as to her finery, nor, as we see incidentally, to enjoying her suppers at Vauxhall. She is anxious to be married—and as soon as possible. A hero, too, should be dignified and of a noble presence; a man who, though he may be as poor as Nicholas Nickleby, should nevertheless be beautiful on all occasions, and never deficient in readiness, address, or self-assertion. *Vanity Fair* is specially declared by the author to be "a novel without a hero," and therefore we have hardly a right to complain of deficiency of heroic conduct in any of the male characters. But Captain Dobbin does become the hero, and is deficient. Why was he called Dobbin, except to make him ridiculous? Why is he so shamefully ugly, so shy, so awkward? Why was he the son of a grocer? Thackeray in so depicting him was determined to run counter to the recognised taste of novel readers. And then again there was the feeling of another great fault. Let there be the virtuous in a novel and let there be the vicious, the dignified and the undignified, the sublime and the ridiculous—only let the virtuous,

the dignified, and the sublime be in the ascendant. Edith Bellenden, and Lord Evandale, and Morton himself would be too stilted, were they not enlivened by Mause, and Cuddie, and Pound-text. But here, in this novel, the vicious and the absurd have been made to be of more importance than the good and the noble. Becky Sharp and Rawdon Crawley are the real heroine and hero of the story. It is with them that the reader is called upon to interest himself. It is of them that he will think when he is reading the book. It is by them that he will judge the book when he has read it. There was no doubt a feeling with the public that though satire may be very well in its place, it should not be made the backbone of a work so long and so important at this. A short story such as *Catherine* or *Barry Lyndon* might be pronounced to have been called for by the iniquities of an outside world; but this seemed to the readers to have been addressed almost to themselves. Now men and women like to be painted as Titian would paint them, or Raffaelle—not as Rembrandt, or even Rubens.

Whether the ideal or the real is the best form of a novel may be questioned, but there can be no doubt that as there are novelists who cannot descend from the bright heaven of the imagination to walk with their feet upon the earth, so there are others to whom it is not given to soar among clouds. The reader must please himself, and make his selection if he cannot enjoy both. There are many who are carried into a heaven of pathos by the woes of a Master of Ravenswood, who fail altogether to be touched by the enduring constancy of a Dobbin. There are others—and I will not say but they may enjoy the keenest delight which literature can give—who cannot employ their minds on fiction unless it be conveyed in poetry. With Thackeray it was essential that the representations made by him should be, to his own thinking, life-like. A Dobbin seemed to him to be such a one as might probably be met with in the world, whereas to his thinking a Ravenswood was simply a creature of the imagination. He should have said of such, as we would say of female faces by Raffaelle, that women would like to be like them, but are not like them. Men might like to be like Ravenswood, and women may dream of men so formed and constituted, but such men do not exist. Dobbins do, and therefore Thackeray chose to write of a Dobbin.

So also of the preference given to Becky Sharp and to Rawdon Crawley. Thackeray thought that more can be done by exposing the vices than extolling the virtues of mankind. No doubt he had a more thorough belief in the one than in the other. The Dobbins he did encounter—seldom; the Rawdon Crawleys very often. He saw around him so much that was mean! He was hurt so often by the little vanities of people! It was thus that he was driven to that overthoughtfulness about snobs of which I have spoken in the last chapter. It thus became natural to him to insist on the thing which he hated with unceasing assiduity, and only to break out now and again into a rapture of love for the true nobility which was dear to him—as he did with the character of Captain Dobbin.

It must be added to all this, that, before he has done with his snob or his knave, he will generally weave in some little trait of humanity by which the sinner shall be relieved from the absolute darkness of utter iniquity. He deals with no Varneys or Deputy-Shepherds, all villany and all lies, because the snobs and knaves he had seen had never been all snob or all knave. Even Shindy probably had some feeling for the poor woman he left at home. Rawdon Crawley loved his wicked wife dearly, and there were moments even with her in which some redeeming trait half reconciles her to the reader.

Such were the faults which were found in *Vanity Fair;* but though the faults were found freely, the book was read by all. Those who are old enough can well remember the effect which it had, and the welcome which was given to the different numbers as they appeared. Though the story is vague and wandering, clearly commenced without any idea of an ending, yet there is something in the telling which makes every portion of it perfect in itself. There are absurdities in it which would not be admitted to anyone who had not a peculiar gift of making even his absurdities delightful. No school-girl who ever lived would have thrown back her gift-book, as Rebecca did the "dixonary," out of the carriage window as she was taken away from School. But who does not love that scene with which the novel commences? How could such a girl as Amelia Osborne have got herself into such society as that in which we see her at Vauxhall? But we forgive it all because of the telling. And then there is that crowning absurdity of Sir Pitt Crawley and his establishment.

I never could understand how Thackeray in his first serious attempt could have dared to subject himself and Sir Pitt Crawley to the critics of the time. Sir Pitt is a baronet, a man of large property, and in Parliament, to whom Becky Sharp goes as a governess at the end of a delightful visit with her friend Amelia Sedley, on leaving Miss Pinkerton's school. The Sedley carriage takes her to Sir Pitt's door. "When the bell was rung a head appeared between the interstices of the dining-room shutters, and the door was opened by a man in drab breeches and gaiters, with a dirty old coat, a foul old neckcloth lashed round his bristly neck, a shining bald head, a leering red face, a pair of twinkling gray eyes, and a mouth perpetually on the grin.

"'This Sir Pitt Crawley's?' says John from the box.

"'E'es,' says the man at the door, with a nod.

"'Hand down these 'ere trunks there,' said John.

"'Hand 'em down yourself,' said the porter."

But John on the box declines to do this, as he cannot leave his horses.

"The bald-headed man, taking his hands out of his breeches' pockets, advanced on this summons, and throwing Miss Sharp's trunk over his shoulder, carried it into the house." Then Becky is shown into the house, and a dismantled dining-room is described nto which she is led by the dirty man with the trunk

Two kitchen chairs, and a round table, and an attenuated old poker and tongs, were, however, gathered round the fireplace, as was a saucepan over a feeble, sputtering fire. There was a bit of cheese and bread and a tin candlestick on the table, and a little black porter in a pint pot.

"Had your dinner, I suppose?" This was said by him of the bald head. "It is not too warm for you? Like a drop of beer?"

"Where is Sir Pitt Crawley?" said Miss Sharp, majestically.

"He, he! I'm Sir Pitt Crawley. Rek'lect you owe me a pint for bringing down your luggage. He, he! ask Tinker if I ain't.

The lady addressed as Mrs. Tinker at this moment made her appearance, with a pipe and a paper of tobacco, for which she had been despatched a minute before Miss Sharp's arrival; and she handed the articles over to Sir Pitt, who had taken his seat by the fire.

"Where's the farden?" said he. "I gave you three half-pence; where's the change, old Tinker?"

"There," replied Mrs. Tinker, flinging down the coin. "It's only baronets as cares about farthings."

Sir Pitt Crawley has always been to me a stretch of audacity which I have been unable to understand. But it has been accepted; and from this commencement of Sir Pitt Crawley have grown the wonderful characters of the Crawley family—old Miss Crawley, the worldly, wicked, pleasure-loving aunt; the Rev. Bute Crawley and his wife, who are quite as worldly; the sanctimonious elder son, who in truth is not less so; and Rawdon, who ultimately becomes Becky's husband—who is the bad hero of the book, as Dobbin is the good hero. They are admirable; but it is quite clear that Thackeray had known nothing of what was coming about them when he caused Sir Pitt to eat his tripe with Mrs. Tinker in the London dining-room.

There is a double story running through the book, the parts of which are but lightly woven together, of which the former tells us the life and adventures of that singular young woman, Becky Sharp; and the other the troubles and ultimate success of our noble hero, Captain Dobbin. Though it be true that readers prefer, or pretend to prefer, the romantic to the common in their novels, and complain of pages which are defiled with that which is low, yet I find that the absurd, the ludicrous, and even the evil, leave more impression behind them than the grand, the beautiful, or even the good. Dominie Sampson, Dugald Dalgetty, and Bothwell are, I think, more remembered than Fergus MacIvor, than Ivanhoe himself, or Mr. Butler the minister. It certainly came to pass that, in spite of the critics, Becky Sharp became the first attraction in *Vanity Fair*. When we speak now of *Vanity Fair*, it is always to Becky that our thoughts recur. She has made a position for herself in the world of fiction, and is one of our established personages.

I have already said how she left school, throwing the "dixonary" out of the window, like dust from her feet, and was taken to spend a few halcyon weeks with her friend Amelia Sedley, at the Sedley mansion in Russell Square. There she meets a brother Sedley home from India—the immortal Jos—at whom she began to set her hitherto untried cap. Here we become acquainted both

with the Sedley and the Osborne families, with all their domestic affections and domestic snobbery, and have to confess that the snobbery is stronger than the affection. As we desire to love Amelia Sedley, we wish that the people around her were less vulgar or less selfish—especially we wish it in regard to that handsome young fellow, George Osborne, whom she loves with her whole heart. But with Jos Sedley we are inclined to be content, though he be fat, purse-proud, awkward, a drunkard, and a coward, because we do not want anything better for Becky. Becky does not want anything better for herself, because the man has money. She has been born a pauper. She knows herself to be but ill qualified to set up as a beauty—though by dint of cleverness she does succeed in that afterwards. She has no advantages in regard to friends or family as she enters life. She must earn her bread for herself. Young as she is, she loves money, and has a great idea of the power of money. Therefore, though Jos is distasteful at all points, she instantly makes her attack. She fails, however, at any rate for the present. She never becomes his wife, but at last she succeeds in getting some of his money. But before that time comes she has many a suffering to endure, and many a triumph to enjoy.

She goes to Sir Pitt Crawley as governess for his second family, and is taken down to Queen's Crawley in the country. There her cleverness prevails, even with the baronet, of whom I have just given Thackeray's portrait. She keeps his accounts, and writes his letters, and helps him to save money; she reads with the elder sister books they ought not to have read; she flatters the sanctimonious son. In point of fact, she becomes all in all at Queen's Crawley, so that Sir Philip himself falls in love with her—for there is reason to think that Sir Pitt may soon become again a widower. But there also came down to the baronet's house, on an occasion of general entertaining, Captain Rawdon Crawley. Of course Becky sets her cap at him, and of course succeeds. She always succeeds. Though she is only the governess, he insists upon dancing with her, to the neglect of all the young ladies of the neighbourhood. They continue to walk together by moonlight—or starlight—the great, heavy, stupid, half-tipsy dragoon, and the intriguing, covetous, altogether unprincipled young woman. And the two young people absolutely come to love one another in their way—the heavy, stupid, fuddled dragoon, and the false, covetous, altogether unprincipled young woman.

The fat aunt Crawley is a maiden lady, very rich, and Becky quite succeeds in gaining the rich aunt by her wiles. The aunt becomes so fond of Becky down in the country, that when she has to return to her own house in town, sick from over-eating, she cannot be happy without taking Becky with her. So Becky is installed in the house in London, having been taken away abruptly from her pupils, to the great dismay of the old lady's long-established resident companion. They all fall in love with her; she makes herself so charming, she is so clever; she can even, by help

of a little care in dressing, become so picturesque! As all this goes on, the reader feels what a great personage is Miss Rebecca Sharp.

Lady Crawley dies down in the country, while Becky is still staying with her sister, who will not part with her. Sir Pitt at once rushes up to town, before the funeral, looking for consolation where only he can find it. Becky brings him down word from his sister's room that the old lady is too ill to see him.

"So much the better," Sir Pitt answered: "I want to see you, Miss Sharp. I want you back at Queen's Crawley, miss," the baronet said. His eyes had such a strange look, and was fixed upon her so steadfastly that Rebecca Sharp began almost to tremble. Then she half promises, talks about the dear children, and angles with the old man. "I tell you I want you," he says; "I'm going back to the vuneral, will you come back? yes or no?"

"I daren't. I don't think—it wouldn't be right--to be alone with you sir," Becky said, seemingly in great agitation.

"I say again, I want you. I can't get along without you. I didn't see what it was till you went away. The house all goes wrong. It's not the same place. All my accounts has got muddled again. You must come back. Do come back. Dear Becky, do come."

"Come—as what, sir?" Rebecca gasped out.

"Come as Lady Crawley, if you like. There, will that zatisfy you? Come back and be my wife. You're vit for it. Birth be hanged. You're as good a lady as ever I see. You've got more brains in your little vinger than any baronet's wife in the country. Will you come? Yes or no?" Rebecca is startled, but the old man goes on. "I'll make you happy; see if I don't. You shall do what you like, spend what you like, and have it all your own way. I'll make you a settlement. I'll do everything regular. Look here," and the old man fell down on his knees and leered at her like a satyr.

But Rebecca, though she had been angling, angling for favour and love and power, had not expected this. For once in her life she loses her presence of mind, and exclaims: "Oh, Sir Pitt; oh, sir; I—I'm married already!" She has married Rawdon Crawley, Sir Pitt's youngest son, Miss Crawley's favourite among those of her family who are looking for her money. But she keeps her secret for the present, and writes a charming letter to the Captain: "Dearest,—Something tells that we shall conquer. You shall leave that odious regiment. Quit gaming, racing, and be a good boy, and we shall all live in Park Lane, and *ma tante* shall leave us all her money." *Ma tante's* money has been in her mind all through, but yet she loves him.

"Suppose the old lady doesn't come to," Rawdon said to his little wife as they sat together in the snug little Brompton lodgings. She had been trying the new piano all the morning. The new gloves fitted her to a nicety. The new shawl became her wonderfully. The new rings glittered on her little hands, and the new watch ticked at her waist.

"*I'll* make your fortune," she said; and Delilah patted Samson's cheek.

"You can do anything," he said, kissing the little hand. "By Jove you can! and we'll drive down to the Star and Garter and dine, by Jove!"

They were neither of them quite heartless at the moment, nor did Rawdon ever become quite bad. Then follow the adventures of Becky as a married woman, through all of which there is a glimmer of love for her stupid husband, while it is the real purpose of her heart to get money how she may—by her charms, by her wit, by her lies, by her readiness. She makes love to everyone—even to her sanctimonious brother-in-law, who becomes Sir Pitt in his time—and always succeeds. But in her love-making there is nothing of love. She gets hold of that well-remembered old reprobate, the Marquis of Steyne, who possesses the two valuable gifts of being very dissolute and very rich, and from him she obtains money and jewels to her heart's desire. The abominations of Lord Steyne are depicted in the strongest language of which *Vanity Fair* admits. The reader's hair stands almost on end in horror at the wickedness of the two wretches—at her desire for money, sheer money; and his for wickedness, sheer wickedness. Then the husband finds her out—poor Rawdon! who with all his faults and thick-headed stupidity, has become absolutely entranced by the wiles of his little wife. He is carried off to a sponging-house, in order that he may be out of the way, and, on escaping unexpectedly from thraldom, finds the lord in his wife's drawing-room. Whereupon he thrashes the old lord, nearly killing him; takes away the plunder which he finds on his wife's person, and hurries away to seek assistance as to further revenge;—for he is determined to shoot the marquis, or to be shot. He goes to one Captain Macmurdo, who is to act as his second, and there he pours out his heart. "You don't know how fond I was of that one," Rawdon said, half-inarticulately. "Damme, I followed her like a footman! I gave up everything I had to her. I'm a beggar because I would marry her. By Jove, sir, I've pawned my own watch to get her anything she fancied. And she—she's been making a purse for herself all the time, and grudged me a hundred pounds to get me out of quod!" His friend alleges that the wife may be innocent after all. "It may be so," Rawdon exclaimed, sadly; but this don't look very innocent!" And he showed the captain the thousand-pound note which he had found in Becky's pocket-book.

But the marquis can do better than fight; and Rawdon, in spite of his true love, can do better than follow the quarrel up to his own undoing. The marquis, on the spur of the moment, gets the lady's husband appointed governor of Coventry Island, with a salary of three thousand pounds a year; and poor Rawdon at last condescends to accept the appointment. He will not see his wife again, but he makes her an allowance out of his income.

In arranging all this, Thackeray is enabled to have a side blow at the British way of distributing patronage—for the favour of which he was afterwards himself a candidate. He quotes as

follows from *The Royalist* newspaper: "We hear that the governorship "—of Coventry Island—" has been offered to Colonel Rawdon Crawley, C.B., a distinguished Waterloo officer. We need not only men of acknowledged bravery, but men of administrative talents to superintend the affairs of our colonies; and we have no doubt that the gentleman selected by the Colonial Office to fill the lamented vacancy which has occurred at Coventry Island is admirably calculated for the post." The reader, however, is aware that the officer in question cannot write a sentence or speak two words correctly.

Our heroine's adventures are carried on much further, but they cannot be given here in detail. To the end she is the same —utterly false, selfish, covetous, and successful. To have made such a woman really in love would have been a mistake. Her husband she likes best—because he is, or was, her own. But there is no man so foul, so wicked, so unattractive, but that she can fawn over him for money and jewels. There are women to whom nothing is nasty, either in person, language, scenes, actions, or principle—and Becky is one of them; and yet she is herself attractive. A most wonderful sketch, for the perpetration of which all Thackeray's power of combine dindignation and humour was necessary!

The story of Amelia and her two lovers, George Osborne and Captain, or, as he came afterwards to be, Major, and Colonel Dobbin, is less interesting, simply because goodness and eulogy are less exciting than wickedness and censure. Amelia is a true, honest-hearted, thoroughly English young woman, who loves her love because he is grand—to her eyes—and loving him, loves him with all her heart. Readers have said that she is silly, only because she is not heroic. I do not know that she is more silly than many young ladies whom we who are old have loved in our youth, or than those whom our sons are loving at the present time. Readers complain of Amelia because she is absolutely true to nature. There are no Raffaellistic touches, no added graces, no divine romance. She is feminine all over, and British—loving, true, thoroughly unselfish, yet with a taste for having things comfortable, forgiving, quite capable of jealousy, but prone to be appeased at once, at the first kiss; quite convinced that her lover, her husband, her children are the people in all the world to whom the greatest consideration is due. Such a one is sure to be the dupe of a Becky Sharp, should a Becky Sharp come in her way—as is the case with so many sweet Amelias whom we have known. But in a matter of love she is sound enough and sensible enough —and she is as true as steel. I know no trait in Amelia which a man would be ashamed to find in his own daughter.

She marries her George Osborne, who, to tell the truth of him, is but a poor kind of fellow, though he is a brave soldier. He thinks much of his own person, and is selfish. Thackeray puts in a touch or two here and there by which he is made to be odious. He would rather give a present to himself than to the girl who loved him. Nevertheless, when her father is ruined he marries

her, and he fights bravely at Waterloo, and is killed. "No more firing was heard at Brussels. The pursuit rolled miles away. Darkness came down on the field and the city; and Amelia was praying for George, who was lying on his face, dead, with a bullet through his heart."

Then follows the long courtship of Dobbin, the true hero—he who has been the friend of George since their old school-days; who has lived with him and served him, and has also loved Amelia. But he has loved her—as one man may love another—solely with a view to the profit of his friend. He has known all along that George and Amelia have been engaged to each other as boy and girl. George would have neglected her, but Dobbin would not allow it. George would have jilted the girl who loved him, but Dobbin would not let him. He had nothing to get for himself, but loving her as he did, it was the work of his life to get for her all that she wanted.

George is shot at Waterloo, and then come fifteen years of widowhood—fifteen years during which Becky is carrying on her manœuvres—fifteen years during which Amelia cannot bring herself to accept the devotion of the old captain, who becomes at last a colonel. But at the end she is won. "The vessel is in port. He has got the prize he has been trying for all his life. The bird has come in at last. There it is, with its head on its shoulder, billing and cooing clean up to his heart, with soft, outstretched fluttering wings. This is what he has asked for every day and hour for eighteen years. This is what he has pined after. Here it is—the summit, the end, the last page of the third volume."

The reader as he closes the book has on his mind a strong conviction, the strongest possible conviction, that among men George is as weak and Dobbin as noble as any that he has met in literature; and that among women Amelia is as true and Becky as vile as any he has encountered. Of so much he will be conscious. In addition to this he will unconsciously have found that every page he has read will have been of interest to him. There has been no padding, no longueurs; every bit will have had its weight with him. And he will find too at the end, if he will think of it—though readers, I fear, seldom think much of this in regard to books they have read—that the lesson taught in every page has been good. There may be details of evil painted so as to disgust—painted almost to plainly—but none painted so as to allure.

CHAPTER IV.

PENDENNIS AND THE NEWCOMES.

THE absence of the heroic was, in Thackeray, so palpable to Thackeray himself that in his original preface to *Pendennis*, when he began to be aware that his reputation was made, he tells his public what they may expect and what they may not, and makes his joking complaint of the readers of his time because they will not endure with patience the true picture of a natural man. "Even the gentlemen of our age," he says—adding that the story of *Pendennis* is an attempt to describe one of them, just as he is—"even those we cannot show as they are with the notorious selfishness of their time and their education. Since the author of *Tom Jones* was buried, no writer of fiction among us has been permitted to depict to his utmost power a MAN. We must shape him, and give him a certain conventional temper." Then he rebukes his audience because they will not listen to the truth. "You will not hear what moves in the real world, what passes in society, in the clubs, colleges, mess-rooms—what is the life and talk of your sons." You want the Raffaellistic touch, or that of some painter of horrors equally removed from the truth. I tell you how a man really does act—as did Fielding with Tom Jones—but it does not satisfy you. You will not sympathise with this young man of mine, this Pendennis, because he is neither angel nor imp. If it be so, let it be so. I will not paint for you angels or imps, because I do not see them. The young man of the day, whom I do see, and of whom I know the inside and the out thoroughly, him I have painted for you; and here he is, whether you like the picture or not. This is what Thackeray meant, and, having this in his mind, he produced *Pendennis*.

The object of a novel should be to instruct in morals while it amuses. I cannot think but that every novelist who has thought much of his art will have realised as much as that for himself. Whether this may best be done by the transcendental or by the common-place is the question which it more behoves the reader than the author to answer, because the author may be fairly sure that he who can do the one will not, probably cannot, do the other. If a lad be only five feet high, he does not try to enlist in the Guards. Thackeray complains that many ladies have "remonstrated and subscribers left him," because of his realistic tendency. Nevertheless he has gone on with his work, and, in *Pendennis*, has

painted a young man as natural as Tom Jones. Had he expended himself in the attempt, he could not have drawn a Master of Ravenswood.

It has to be admitted that Pendennis is not a fine fellow He is not as weak, as selfish, as untrustworthy as that George Osborne whom Amelia married in *Vanity Fair;* but nevertheless, he is weak, and selfish, and untrustworthy. He is not such a one as a father would wish to see his son, or a mother to welcome as a lover for her daughter. But then, fathers are so often doomed to find their sons not all that they wish, and mothers to see their girls falling in love with young men who are not Paladins. In our individual lives we are contented to endure an admixture of evil, which we should resent if imputed to us in the general. We presume ourselves to be truth-speaking, noble in our sentiments, generous in our actions, modest and unselfish, chivalrous and devoted. But we forgive and pass over in silence a few delinquencies among ourselves. What boy at school ever is a coward—in the general? What gentleman ever tells a lie? What young lady is greedy? We take it for granted, as though they were fixed rules in life, that our boys from our public schools look us in the face and are manly; that our gentlemen tell the truth as a matter of course; and that our young ladies are refined and unselfish. Thackeray is always protesting that it is not so, and that no good is to be done by blinking the truth. He knows that we have our little home experiences. Let us have the facts out, and mend what is bad if we can. This novel of *Pendennis* is one of his loudest protests to this effect.

I will not attempt to tell the story of Pendennis, how his mother loved him, how he first came to be brought up together with Laura Bell, how he thrashed the other boys when he was a boy, and how he fell in love with Miss Fotheringay, née Costigan, and was determined to marry her while he was still a hobbledehoy, how he went up to Boniface, that well-known college at Oxford, and there did no good, spending money which he had not got, and learning to gamble. The English gentleman, as we know, never lies; but Pendennis is not quite truthful; when the college tutor, thinking that he hears the rattling of dice, makes his way into Pen's room, Pen and his two companions are found with three *Homers* before them, and Pen asks the tutor with great gravity: "What was the present condition of the river Scamander, and whether it was navigable or no?" He tells his mother that, during a certain vacation he must stay up and read, instead of coming home—but, nevertheless, he goes up to London to amuse himself. The reader is soon made to understand that, though Pen may be a fine gentleman, he is not trustworthy. But he repents and comes home, and kisses his mother; only, alas! he will always be kissing somebody else also.

The story of the Amorys and the Claverings, and that wonderful French cook M. Alcide Mirobolant, forms one of those delightful digressions which Thackeray scatters through his novels rather than weaves into them. They generally have but little to

do with the story itself, and are brought in only as giving scope for some incident to the real hero or heroine. But in this digression Pen is very much concerned indeed, for he is brought to the very verge of matrimony with that peculiarly disagreeable lady Miss Amory. He does escape at last, but only within a few pages of the end, when we are made unhappy by the lady's victory over that poor young sinner Foker, with whom we have all come to sympathise, in spite of his vulgarity and fast propensities. She would to the last fain have married Pen, in whom she believes, thinking that he would make a name for her. "Il me faut des émotions," says Blanche. Whereupon the author, as he leaves her, explains the nature of this Miss Amory's feelings. "For this young lady was not able to carry out any emotion to the full, but had a sham enthusiasm, a sham hatred, a sham love, a sham taste, a sham grief; each of which flared and shone very vehemently for an instant, but subsided and gave place to the next sham emotion." Thackeray, when he drew this portrait, must certainly have had some special young lady in his view. But though we are made unhappy for Foker, Foker too escapes at last, and Blanche, with her emotions, marries that very doubtful nobleman Comte Montmorenci de Valentinois.

But all this of Miss Amory is but an episode. The purport of the story is the way in which the hero is made to enter upon the world, subject as he has been to the sweet teaching of his mother, and subject as he is made to be to the worldly lessons of his old uncle the major. Then he is ill, and nearly dies, and his mother comes up to nurse him. And there is his friend Warrington, of whose family down in Suffolk we shall have heard something when we have read *The Virginians*—one, I think, of the finest characters, as it is certainly one of the most touching, that Thackeray ever drew. Warrington, and Pen's mother, and Laura are our hero's better angels—angels so good as to make us wonder that a creature so weak should have had such angels about him; though we are driven to confess that their affection and loyalty for him are natural. There is a melancholy beneath the roughness of Warrington, and a feminine softness combined with the reticent manliness of the man, which have endeared him to readers beyond perhaps any character in the book. Major Pendennis has become immortal. Selfish, worldly, false, padded, caring altogether for things mean and poor in themselves; still the reader likes him. It is not quite all for himself. To Pen he is good—to Pen, who is the head of his family, and to come after him as the Pendennis of the day. To Pen and to Pen's mother he is beneficent after his lights. In whatever he undertakes, it is so contrived that the reader shall in some degree sympathise with him. And so it is with poor old Costigan, the drunken Irish captain, Miss Fotheringay's papa. He was not a pleasant person. "We have witnessed the déshabille of Major Pendennis," says our author; "will any one wish to be valet-de-chambre to our other hero, Costigan? It would seem that the captain, before issuing from his bedroom,

scented himself with otto of whisky." Yet there is a kindliness about him which softens our hearts, though in truth he is very careful that the kindness shall always be shown to himself.

Among these people Pen makes his way to the end of the novel, coming near to shipwreck on various occasions, and always deserving the shipwreck which he has almost encountered. Then there will arise the question whether it might not have been better that he should be altogether shipwrecked, rather than housed comfortably with such a wife as Laura, and left to that enjoyment of happiness forever after, which is the normal heaven prepared for heroes and heroines who have done their work well through three volumes. It is almost the only instance in all Thackeray's works in which this state of bliss is reached. George Osborne, who is the beautiful lover in *Vanity Fair*, is killed almost before our eyes, on the field of battle, and we feel that Nemesis has with justice taken hold of him. Poor old Dobbin does marry the widow, after fifteen years of further service, when we know him to be a middle-aged man and her a middle-aged woman. That glorious Paradise of which I have spoken requires a freshness which can hardly be attributed to the second marriage of a widow who has been fifteen years mourning for her first husband. Clive Newcome, "the first young man," if we may so call him, of the novel which I shall mention just now, is carried so far beyond his matrimonial elysium that we are allowed to see too plainly how far from true may be those promises of hymeneal happiness forever after. The cares of married life have settled down heavily upon his young head before we leave him. He not only marries, but loses his wife, and is left a melancholy widower with his son. Esmond and Beatrix certainly reach no such elysium as that of which we are speaking. But Pen, who surely deserved a Nemesis, though perhaps not one so black as that demanded by George Osborne's delinquencies, is treated as though he had been passed through the fire, and had come out—if not pure gold, still gold good enough for goldsmiths. "And what sort of a husband will this Pendennis be?" This is the question asked by the author himself at the end of the novel; feeling, no doubt, some hesitation as to the justice of what he had just done. "And what sort of a husband will this Pendennis be?" many a reader will ask, doubting the happiness of such a marriage and the future of Laura. The querists are referred to that lady herself, who, seeing his faults and wayward moods—seeing and owning that there are better men than he—loves him always with the most constant affection. The assertion could be made with perfect confidence, but is not to the purpose. That Laura's affection should be constant, no one would doubt; but more than that is wanted for happiness. How about Pendennis and his constancy?

The Newcomes, which I bracket in this chapter with *Pendennis*, was not written till after *Esmond*, and appeared between that novel and *The Virginians*, which was a sequel to *Esmond*. It is supposed to be edited by Pen, whose own adventures we have just completed, and is commenced by that celebrated night passed by

Colonel Newcome and his boy Clive at the Cave of Harmony, during which the colonel is at first so pleasantly received and so genially entertained, but from which he is at last banished, indignant at the iniquities of our drunken old friend Captain Costigan, with whom we had become intimate in Pen's own memoirs. The boy Clive is described as being probably about sixteen. At the end of the story he has run through the adventures of his early life, and is left a melancholy man, a widower, one who has suffered the extremity of misery from a stepmother, and who is wrapped up in the only son that is left to him—as had been the case with his father at the beginning of the novel. *The Newcomes*, therefore, like Thackeray's other tales, is rather a slice from the biographical memoirs of a family, than a romance or novel in itself.

It is full of satire from the first to the last page. Every word of it seems to have been written to show how vile and poor a place this world is; how prone men are to deceive, how prone to be deceived. There is a scene in which "his Excellency Rummun Loll, otherwise his Highness Rummun Loll," is introduced to Colonel Newcome—or rather presented—for the two men had known each other before. All London was talking of Rummun Loll, taking him for an Indian prince, but the colonel, who had served in India, knew better. Rummun Loll was no more than a merchant, who had made a precarious fortune by doubtful means. All the girls, nevertheless, are running after his Excellency. "He's known to have two wives already in India," says Barnes Newcome; "but, by gad, for a settlement, I believe some of the girls here would marry him." We have a delightful illustration of the London girls, with their bare necks and shoulders, sitting round Rummun Loll and worshipping him as he reposes on his low settee. There are a dozen of them so enchanted that the men who wish to get a sight of the Rummun are quite kept at a distance. This is satire on the women. A few pages on we come upon a clergyman who is no more real than Rummun Loll. The clergyman, Charles Honeyman, had married the colonel's sister and had lost his wife, and now the brothers-in-law meet. "'Poor, poor Emma!' exclaimed the ecclesiastic, casting his eyes towards the chandelier and passing a white cambric pocket-handkerchief gracefully before them. No man in London understood the ring business or the pocket-handkerchief business better, or smothered his emotion more beautifully. 'In the gayest moments, in the giddiest throng of fashion, the thoughts of the past will rise; the departed will be among us still. But this is not the strain wherewith to greet the friend newly arrived on our shores. How it rejoices me to behold you in old England!'" And so the satirist goes on with Mr. Honeyman the clergyman. Mr. Honeyman the clergyman has been already mentioned, in that extract made in our first chapter from *Lovel the Widower*. It was he who assisted another friend, "with his wheedling tongue," in inducing Thackeray to purchase that "neat little literary paper"—called then *The Museum*, but which was in truth *The National Standard*. In describing Barnes Newcome, the colonel's relative,

Thackeray in the same scene attacks the sharpness of the young men of business of the present day. There were, or were to be, some transactions with Rummun Loll, and Barnes Newcome, being in doubt, asks the colonel a question or two as to the certainty of the Rummun's money, much to the colonel's disgust. "The young man of business had dropped his drawl or his languor, and was speaking quite unaffectedly, good-naturedly, and selfishly. Had you talked to him for a week you would not have made him understand the scorn and loathing with which the colonel regarded him. Here was a young fellow as keen as the oldest curmudgeon—a lad with scarce a beard to his chin, that would pursue his bond as rigidly as Shylock." "Barnes Newcome never missed a church," he goes on, "or dressing for dinner. He never kept a tradesman waiting for his money. He seldom drank too much, and never was late for business, or huddled over his toilet, however brief his sleep or severe his headache. In a word, he was as scrupulously whited as any sepulchre in the whole bills of mortality." Thackeray had lately seen some Barnes Newcome when he wrote that.

It is all satire; but there is generally a touch of pathos even through the satire. It is satire when Miss Quigley, the governess in Park Street, falls in love with the old colonel after some dim fashion of her own. "When she is walking with her little charges in the Park, faint signals of welcome appear on her wan cheeks. She knows the dear colonel amidst a thousand horsemen." The colonel had drunk a glass of wine with her after his stately fashion, and the foolish old maid thinks too much of it. Then we are told how she knits purses for him, "as she sits alone in the schoolroom—high up in that lone house, when the little ones are long since asleep—before her dismal little tea-tray, and her little desk containing her mother's letters and her mementoes of home." Miss Quigley is an ass; but we are made to sympathise entirely with the ass, because of that morsel of pathos as to her mother's letters.

Clive Newcome, our hero, who is a second Pen, but a better fellow, is himself a satire on young men—on young men that are idle and ambitious at the same time. He is a painter; but, instead of being proud of his art, is half ashamed of it—because not being industrious he has not, while yet young, learned to excel. He is "doing" a portrait of Mrs. Pendennis, Laura, and thus speaks of his business. "No 666"—he is supposed to be quoting from the catalogue of the Royal Academy for the year—"No. 666. Portrait of Joseph Muggins, Esq., Newcome, George Street. No. 979. Portrait of Mrs. Muggins on her gray pony, Newcome. No. 579. Portrait of Joseph Muggins, Esq.'s dog Toby, Newcome. This is what I am fit for. These are the victories I have set myself on achieving. Oh, Mrs. Pendennis! isn't it humiliating? Why isn't there a war? Why haven't I a genius? There is a painter who lives hard by, and who begs me to come and look at his work. He is in the Muggins line too. He gets his canvases with a good light upon them; excludes the contemplation of other objects; stands

beside his picture in an attitude himself; and thinks that he and they are masterpieces. Oh me, what drivelling wretches we are! Fame!—except that of just the one or two—what's the use of it?" In all of which Thackeray is speaking his own feelings about himself as well as the world at large. What's the use of it all? Oh vanitas vanitatum! Oh vanity and vexation of spirit! "So Clive Newcome," he says afterwards, "lay on a bed of down and tossed and tumbled there. He went to fine dinners, and sat silent over them; rode fine horses, and black care jumped up behind the moody horseman." As I write this I have before me a letter from Thackeray to a friend describing his own success when *Vanity Fair* was coming out, full of the same feeling. He is making money, but he spends it so fast that he never has any; and as for the opinions expressed on his books, he cares little for what he hears. There was always present to him a feeling of black care seated behind the horseman—and would have been equally so had there been no real care present to him. A sardonic melancholy was the characteristic most common to him—which, however, was relieved by an always present capacity for instant frolic. It was these attributes combined which made him of all satirists the most humorous, and of all humorists the most satirical. It was these that produced the Osbornes, the Dobbins, the Pens, the Clives, and the Newcomes, whom, when he loved them the most, he could not save himself from describing as mean and unworthy. A somewhat heroic hero of romance—such a one, let us say, as Waverley, or Lovel in *The Antiquary*, or Morton in *Old Mortality*—was revolting to him, as lacking those foibles which human nature seemed to him to demand.

The story ends with two sad tragedies, neither of which would have been demanded by the story, had not such sadness been agreeable to the author's own idiosyncrasy. The one is the ruin of the old colonel's fortunes, he having allowed himself to be enticed into bubble speculations; and the other is the loss of all happiness, and even comfort, to Clive the hero, by the abominations of his mother-in-law. The woman is so iniquitous, and so tremendous in her iniquities, that she rises to tragedy. Who does not know Mrs. Mack the Campaigner? Why at the end of his long story should Thackeray have married his hero to so lackadaisical a heroine as poor little Rosey, or brought on the stage such a she-demon as Rosey's mother? But there is the Campaigner in all her vigour, a marvel of strength of composition—one of the most vividly drawn characters in fiction—but a woman so odious that one is induced to doubt whether she should have been depicted.

The other tragedy is altogether of a different kind, and though unnecessary to the story, and contrary to that practice of story-telling which seems to demand that calamities to those personages with whom we are to sympathise should not be brought in at the close of a work of fiction, is so beautifully told that no lover of Thackeray's work would be willing to part with it. The old colonel, as we have said, is ruined by speculation, and in his ruin is brought to accept the alms of the brotherhood of the Grey Friars. Then

we are introduced to the Charter House, at which, as most of us know, there still exists a brotherhood of the kind. He dons the gown—this old colonel, who had always been comfortable in his means, and latterly apparently rich—and occupies the single room, and eats the doled bread, and among his poor brothers sits in the chapel of his order. The description is perhaps as fine as anything that Thackeray ever did. The gentleman is still the gentleman, with all the pride of gentry;—but not the less is he the humble bedesman, aware that he is living upon charity, not made to grovel by any sense of shame, but knowing that, though his normal pride may be left to him, an outward demeanour of humility is befitting.

And then he dies. "At the usual evening hour the chapel bell began to toll, and Thomas Newcome's hands outside the bed feebly beat time—and just as the last bell struck, a peculiar sweet smile shone over his face, and he lifted up his head a little, and quickly said, 'Adsum'—and fell back. It was the word we used at school when names were called; and, lo, he whose heart was as that of a little child had answered to his name, and stood in the presence of his Maker!"

CHAPTER V.

ESMOND AND THE VIRGINIANS.

THE novel with which we are now going to deal I regard as the greatest work that Thackeray did. Though I do not hesitate to compare himself with himself, I will make no comparison between him and others; I therefore abstain from assigning to *Esmond* any special niche among prose fictions in the English language, but I rank it so high as to justify me in placing him among the small number of the highest class of English novelists. Much as I think of *Barry Lyndon* and *Vanity Fair*, I cannot quite say this of them; but, as a chain is not stronger than its weakest link, so is a poet, or a dramatist, or a novelist to be placed in no lower level than that which he has attained by his highest sustained flight. The excellence which has been reached here Thackeray achieved, without doubt, by giving a greater amount of forethought to the work he had before him than had been his wont. When we were young we used to be told, in our house at home, that "elbow-grease" was the one essential necessary to getting a tough piece of work well done. If a mahogany table was to be made to shine, it was elbow-grease that the operation needed. Forethought is the elbow-grease which a novelist—or poet—or dramatist—requires. It is not only his plot that has to be turned and re-turned in his mind, not his plot chiefly, but he has to make himself sure of his situations, of his characters, of his effects, so that when the time comes for hitting the nail he may know where to hit it on the head—so that he may himself understand the passion, the calmness, the virtues, the vices, the rewards and punishments which he means to explain to others—so that his proportions shall be correct, and he be saved from the absurdity of devoting two-thirds of his book to the beginning, or two-thirds to the completion of his task. It is from want of this special labour, more frequently than from intellectual deficiency, that the tellers of stories fail so often to hit their nails on the head. To think of a story is much harder work than to write it. The author can sit down with the pen in his hand for a given time, and produce a certain number of words. That is comparatively easy, and if he have a conscience in regard to his task, work will be done regularly. But to think it over as you lie in bed, or walk about, or sit cosily over your fire, to turn it all in your thoughts, and make the things fit—that requires elbow-grease of the mind. The

arrangement of the words is as though you were walking simply along a road. The arrangement of your story is as though you were carrying a sack of flour while you walked. Fielding had carried his sack of flour before he wrote *Tom Jones*, and Scott his before he produced *Ivanhoe*. So had Thackeray done—a very heavy sack of flour—in creating *Esmond*. In *Vanity Fair*, in *Pendennis*, and in *The Newcomes*, there was more of that mere wandering in which no heavy burden was borne. The richness of the author's mind, the beauty of his language, his imagination and perception of character, are all there. For that which was lovely he has shown his love, and for the hateful his hatred; but, nevertheless, they are comparatively idle books. His only work, as far as I can judge them, in which there is no touch of idleness, is *Esmond*. *Barry Lyndon* is consecutive, and has the well-sustained purpose of exhibiting a finished rascal; but *Barry Lyndon* is not quite the same from beginning to end. All his full-fledged novels, except *Esmond*, contain rather strings of incidents and memoirs of individuals, than a completed story. But *Esmond* is a whole from beginning to end, with its tale well told, its purpose developed, its moral brought home—and its nail hit well on the head and driven in.

I told Thackeray once that it was not only his best work, but so much the best, that there was none second to it. "That was what I intended," he said, "but I have failed. Nobody reads it. After all, what does it matter?" he went on after awhile. "If they like anything, one ought to be satisfied. After all, Esmond was a prig." Then he laughed and changed the subject, not caring to dwell on thoughts painful to him. The elbow-grease of thinking was always distasteful to him, and had no doubt been so when he conceived and carried out this work.

To the ordinary labour necessary for such a novel he added very much by his resolution to write it in a style different, not only from that which he had made his own, but from that also which belonged to the time. He had devoted himself to the reading of the literature of Queen Anne's reign, and having chosen to throw his story into that period, and to create in it personages who were to be peculiarly concerned with the period, he resolved to use as the vehicle for his story the forms of expression then prevalent. No one who has not tried it can understand how great is the difficulty of mastering a phase of one's own language other than that which habit has made familiar. To write in another language, if the language be sufficiently known, is a much less arduous undertaking. The lad who attempts to write his essay in Ciceronian Latin struggles to achieve a style which is not indeed common to him, but is more common than any other he has become acquainted with in that tongue. But Thackeray in his work had always to remember his Swift, his Steele, and his Addison, and to forget at the same time the modes of expression which the day had adopted. Whether he asked advice on the subject, I do not know. But I feel sure that if he did he must have been counselled against it.

Let my reader think what advice he would give to any writer on such a subject. Probably he asked no advice, and would have taken none. No doubt he found himself, at first imperceptibly, gliding into a phraseology which had attractions for his ear, and then probably was so charmed with the peculiarly masculine forms of sentences which thus became familiar to him, that he thought it would be almost as difficult to drop them altogether as altogether to assume the use of them. And if he could do so successfully, how great would be the assistance given to the local colouring which is needed for a novel in prose, the scene of which is thrown far back from the writer's period! Were I to write a poem about Cœur de Lion, I should not mar my poem by using the simple language of the day; but if I write a prose story of the time, I cannot altogether avoid some attempt at far-away quaintnesses in language. To call a purse a "gypsire," and to begin your little speeches with "Marry come up," or to finish them with "Quotha," are but poor attempts. But even they have had their effect. Scott did the best he could with his Cœur de Lion. When we look to it we find that it was but little; though in his hands it passed for much. "By my troth," said the knight, "thou hast sung well and heartily, and in high praise of thine order." We doubt whether he achieved any similarity to the language of the time; but still, even in the little which he attempted, there was something of the picturesque. But how much more would be done if in very truth the whole language of a story could be thrown with correctness into the form of expression used at the time depicted?

It was this that Thackeray tried in his *Esmond*, and he has done it almost without a flaw. The time in question is near enough to us, and the literature sufficiently familiar to enable us to judge. Whether folk swore by their troth in the days of King Richard I. we do not know, but when we read Swift's letters, and Addison's papers, or Defoe's novels, we do catch the veritable sounds of Queen Anne's age, and can say for ourselves whether Thackeray has caught them correctly or not. No reader can doubt that he has done so. Nor is the reader ever struck with the affectation of an assumed dialect. The words come as though they had been written naturally—though not natural to the middle of the nineteenth century. It was a *tour de force*, and successful as such a *tour de force* so seldom is. But though Thackeray was successful in adopting the tone he wished to assume, he never quite succeeded, as far as my ear can judge, in altogether dropping it again.

And yet it has to be remembered that though *Esmond* deals with the times of Queen Anne, and "copies the language" of the time, as Thackeray himself says in the dedication, the story is not supposed to have been written till the reign of George II. Esmond in his narrative speaks of Fielding and Hogarth, who did their best work under George II. The idea is that Henry Esmond, the hero, went out to Virginia after the events told, and there wrote the memoir in the form of an autobiography. The estate of Castlewood, in Virginia, had been given to the Esmond family by Charles II.;

and this Esmond, our hero, finding that expatriation would best suit both his domestic happiness and his political difficulties—as the reader of the book will understand might be the case—settles himself in the colony, and there writes the history of his early life. He retains the manners, and with the manners the language of his youth. He lives among his own people, a country gentleman with a broad domain, mixing but little with the world beyond, and remains an English gentleman of the time of Queen Anne. The story is continued in *The Virginians*, the name given to a record of two lads who were grandsons of Harry Esmond, whose names are Warrington. Before *The Virginians* appeared we had already become acquainted with a scion of that family, the friend of Arthur Pendennis, a younger son of Sir Miles Warrington, of Suffolk. Henry Esmond's daughter had in a previous generation married a younger son of the then baronet. This is mentioned now to show the way in which Thackeray's mind worked afterwards upon the details and characters which he had originated in *Esmond*.

It is not my purpose to tell the story here, but rather to explain the way in which it is written, to show how it differs from other stories, and thus to explain its effect. Harry Esmond, who tells the story, is of course the hero. There are two heroines who equally command our sympathy—Lady Castlewood, the wife of Harry's kinsman, and her daughter Beatrix. Thackeray himself declared the man to be a prig, and he was not altogether wrong. Beatrix, with whom throughout the whole book he is in love, knew him well. "Shall I be frank with you, Harry," she says, when she is engaged to another suitor, "and say that if you had not been down on your knees and so humble, you might have fared better with me? A woman of my spirit, cousin, is to be won by gallantry, and not by sighs and rueful faces. All the time you are worshipping and singing hymns to me, I know very well I am no goddess." And again: "As for you, you want a woman to bring your slippers and cap, and to sit at your feet and cry, O caro, caro! O bravo! whilst you read your Shakespeares and Miltons and stuff." He was a prig, and the girl he loved knew him, and being quite of another way of thinking herself, would have nothing to say to him in the way of love. But without something of the aptitudes of a prig the character which the author intended could not have been drawn. There was to be courage—military courage—and that propensity to fighting which the tone of the age demanded in a finished gentleman. Esmond, therefore, is already enough to use his sword. But at the same time he has to live as becomes one whose name is in some degree under a cloud; for though he be not in truth an illegitimate offshoot of the noble family which is his, and though he knows that he is not so, still he has to live as though he were. He becomes a soldier, and it was just then that our army was accustomed "to swear horribly in Flanders." But Esmond likes his books, and cannot swear or drink like other soldiers. Nevertheless he has a sort of liking for fast ways in others, knowing that such are the ways of a gallant cavalier. There is a melancholy over his

life which makes him always, to himself and to others, much older than his years. He is well aware that, being as he is, it is impossible that Beatrix should love him. Now and then there is a dash of lightness about him, as though he had taught himself, in his philosophy, that even sorrow may be borne with a smile—as though there was something in him of the Stoic's doctrine, which made him feel that even disappointed love should not be seen to wound too deep. But still, when he smiles, even when he indulges in some little pleasantry, there is that garb of melancholy over him which always makes a man a prig. But he is a gentleman from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot. Thackeray had let the whole power of his intellect apply itself to a conception of the character of a gentleman. This man is brave, polished, gifted with that old-fashioned courtesy which ladies used to love, true as steel, loyal as faith himself, with a power of self-abnegation which astonishes the criticising reader when he finds such a virtue carried to such an extent without seeming to be unnatural. To draw the picture of a man, and say that he is gifted with all the virtues, is easy enough—easy enough to describe him as performing all the virtues. The difficulty is to put your man on his legs, and make him move about, carrying his virtues with a natural gait, so that the reader shall feel that he is becoming acquainted with flesh and blood, not with a wooden figure. The virtues are all there with Henry Esmond, and the flesh and blood also, so that the reader believes in them. But still there is left a flavour of the character which Thackeray himself tasted when he called his hero a prig.

The two heroines, Lady Castlewood and Beatrix, are mother and daughter, of whom the former is in love with Esmond, and the latter is loved by him. Fault has been found with the story, because of the unnatural rivalry—because it has been felt that a mother's solicitude for her daughter should admit of no such juxtaposition. But the criticism has come, I think, from those who have failed to understand, not from those who have understood the tale; not because they have read it, but because they have not read it, and have only looked at it or heard of it. Lady Castlewood is perhaps ten years older than the boy Esmond, whom she first finds in her husband's house, and takes as a *protégé;* and from the moment in which she finds that he is in love with her own daughter, she does her best to bring about a marriage between them. Her husband is alive, and though he is a drunken brute—after the manner of lords of that time—she is thoroughly loyal to him. The little touches, of which the woman is herself altogether unconscious, that gradually turn a love for the boy into a love for the man, are told so delicately, that it is only at last that the reader perceives what has in truth happened to the woman. She is angry with him, grateful to him, careful over him, gradually conscious of all his worth, and of all that he does to her and hers, till at last her heart is unable to resist. But then she is a widow;—and Beatrix has declared that her ambition will not allow her to marry so humble a swain, and Esmond has become—as he says of himself

when he calls himself "an old gentleman"—"the guardian of all the family," "fit to be the grandfather of you all."

The character of Lady Castlewood has required more delicacy in its manipulation than perhaps any other which Thackeray has drawn. There is a mixture in it of self-negation and of jealousy, of gratefulness of heart and of the weary thoughtfulness of age, of occasional sprightiness with deep melancholy, of injustice with a thorough appreciation of the good around her, of personal weakness —as shown always in her intercourse with her children, and of personal strength—as displayed when she vindicates the position of her kinsman Henry to the Duke of Hamilton, who is about to marry Beatrix;—a mixture which has required a master's hand to trace. These contradictions are essentially feminine. Perhaps it must be confessed that in the unreasonableness of the woman, the author has intended to bear more harshly on the sex than it deserves. But a true woman will forgive him, because of the truth of Lady Castlewood's heart. Her husband had been killed in a duel, and there were circumstances which had induced her at the moment to quarrel with Harry and to be unjust to him. He had been ill, and had gone away to the wars, and then she had learned the truth, and had been wretched enough. But when he comes back, and she sees him, by chance at first, as the anthem is being sung in the cathedral choir, as she is saying her prayers, her heart flows over with tenderness to him. "I knew you would come back," she said; "and to-day, Henry, in the anthem when they sang it—'When the Lord turned the captivity of Zion we were like them that dream'—I thought, yes, like them that dream—them that dream. And then it went on, 'They that sow in tears shall reap in joy, and he that goeth forth and weepeth shall doubtless come home again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.' I looked up from the book and saw you. I was not surprised when I saw you. I knew you would come, my dear, and saw the gold sunshine round your head." And so it goes on running into expressions of heart-melting tenderness. And yet she herself does not know that her own heart is seeking his with all a woman's love. She is still willing that he should possess Beatrix. "I would call you my son," she says, "sooner than the greatest prince in Europe." But she warns him of the nature of her own girl. "'Tis for my poor Beatrix I tremble, whose headstrong will affrights me, whose jealous temper, and whose vanity no prayers of mine can cure." It is but very gradually that Esmond becomes aware of the truth. Indeed, he has not become altogether aware of it till the tale closes. The reader does not see that transfer of affection from the daughter to the mother which would fail to reach his sympathy. In the last page of the last chapter it is told that it is so—that Esmond marries Lady Castlewood—but it is not told till all the incidents of the story have been completed.

But of the three characters I have named, Beatrix is the one that has most strongly exercised the writer's powers, and will most interest the reader. As far as outward person is concerned, she is

very lovely—so charming that every man that comes near to her submits himself to her attractions and caprices. It is but rarely that a novelist can succeed in impressing his reader with a sense of female loveliness. The attempt is made so frequently—comes so much as a matter of course in every novel that is written, and fails so much as a matter of course, that the reader does not feel the failure. There are things which we do not expect to have done for us in literature, because they are done so seldom. Novelists are apt to describe the rural scenes among which their characters play their parts, but seldom leave any impression of the places described. Even in poetry how often does this occur? The words used are pretty, well chosen, perhaps musical to the ear, and in that way befitting; but unless the spot has violent characteristics of its own, such as Burley's cave or the waterfall of Lodore, no striking portrait is left. Nor are we disappointed as we read, because we have not been taught to expect it to be otherwise. So it is with those word painted portraits of women, which are so frequently given and so seldom convey any impression. Who has an idea of the outside look of Sophia Western, or Edith Bellenden, or even of Imogen, though Iachimo, who described her, was so good at words? A series of pictures—illustrations—as we have with Dickens' novels, and with Thackeray's, may leave an impression of a figure—though even then not often of feminine beauty. But in this work Thackeray has succeeded in imbuing us with a sense of the outside loveliness of Beatrix by the mere force of words. We are not only told it, but we feel that she was such a one as a man cannot fail to covet, even when his judgment goes against his choice.

Here the judgment goes altogether against the choice. The girl grows up before us from her early youth till her twenty-fifth or twenty-sixth year, and becomes—such as her mother described her—one whose headlong will, whose jealousy, and whose vanity nothing could restrain. She has none of those soft foibles, half allied to virtues, by which weak women fall away into misery or perhaps distraction. She does not want to love or to be loved. She does not care to be fondled. She has no longing for caresses. She wants to be admired—and to make use of the admiration she shall achieve for the material purposes of her life. She wishes to rise in the world; and her beauty is the sword with which she must open her oyster. As to her heart, it is a thing of which she becomes aware, only to assure herself that it must be laid aside and put out of the question. Now and again Esmond touches it. She just feels that she has a heart to be touched. But she never has a doubt as to her conduct in that respect. She will not allow her dreams of ambition to be disturbed by such folly as love.

In all that there might be something, if not good and great, nevertheless grand, if her ambition, though worldly, had in it a touch of nobility. But this poor creature is made with her bleared blind eyes to fall into the very lowest depths of feminine ignobility. One lover comes after another. Harry Esmond is, of course, the

lover with whom the reader interests himself. At last there comes a duke—fifty years old, indeed, but with semi-royal appanages. As his wife she will become a duchess, with many diamonds, and be Her Excellency. The man is stern, cold, and jealous; but she does not doubt for a moment. She is to be Duchess of Hamilton, and towers already in pride of place above her mother, and her kinsman lover, and all her belongings. The story here, with its little incidents of birth, and blood, and ignoble pride, and gratified ambition, with a dash of true feminine nobility on the part of the girl's mother, is such as to leave one with the impression that it has hardly been beaten in English prose fiction. Then, in the last moment, the duke is killed in a duel, and the news is brought to the girl by Esmond. She turns upon him and rebukes him harshly. Then she moves away, and feels in a moment that there is nothing left for her in this world, and that she can only throw herself upon devotion for consolation. "I am best in my own room and by myself," she said. Her eyes were quite dry, nor did Esmond ever see them otherwise, save once, in respect of that grief. She gave him a cold hand as she went out. "Thank you, brother," she said in a low voice, and with a simplicity more touching than tears; "all that you have said is true and kind, and I will go away and will ask pardon."

But the consolation coming from devotion did not go far with such a one as her. We cannot rest on religion merely by saying that we will do so. Very speedily there comes consolation in another form. Queen Anne is on her deathbed, and a young Stuart prince appears upon the scene, of whom some loyal hearts dream that they can make a king. He is such as Stuarts were, and only walks across the novelist's canvas to show his folly and heartlessness. But there is a moment in which Beatrix thinks that she may rise in the world to the proud place of a royal mistress. That is her last ambition! That is her pride! That is to be her glory! The bleared eyes can see no clearer than that. But the mock prince passes away, and nothing but the disgrace of the wish remains.

Such is the story of *Esmond*, leaving with it, as does all Thackeray's work, a melancholy conviction of the vanity of all things human. *Vanitas vanitatum*, as he wrote on the pages of the French lady's album, and again in one of the earlier numbers of *The Cornhill Magazine*. With much that is picturesque, much that is droll, much that is valuable as being a correct picture of the period selected, the gist of the book is melancholy throughout. It ends with the promise of happiness to come, but that is contained merely in a concluding paragraph. The one woman, during the course of the story, becomes a widow, with a living love in which she has no hope, with children for whom her fears are almost stronger than her affection, who never can rally herself to happiness for a moment. The other, with all her beauty and all her brilliance, becomes what we have described—and marries at last her brother's tutor, who becomes a bishop by means of her in

trigues. Esmond, the hero, who is compounded of all good gifts, after a childhood and youth tinged throughout with melancholy, vanishes from us, with the promise that he is to be rewarded by the hand of the mother of the girl he has loved. .

And yet there is not a page in the book over which a thoughtful reader cannot pause with delight. The nature in it is true nature. Given a story thus sad, and persons thus situated, and it is thus that the details would follow each other, and thus that the people would conduct themselves. It was the tone of Thackeray's mind to turn away from the prospect of things joyful, and to see—or believe that he saw—in all human affairs, the seed of something base, of something which would be antagonistic to true contentment. All his snobs, and all his fools, and all his knaves, come from the same conviction. It is not the doctrine on which our religion is founded—though the sadness of it there is alleviated by the doubtful promise of a heaven ?

> Though thrice a thousand years are passed
> Since David's son, the sad and splendid,
> The weary king ecclesiast
> Upon his awful tablets penned it.

So it was that Thackeray preached his sermon. But melancholy though it be, the lesson taught in *Esmond* is salutary from beginning to end. The sermon truly preached is that glory can only come from that which is truly glorious, and that the results of meanness end always in the mean. No girl will be taught to wish to shine like Beatrix, nor will any youth be made to think that to gain the love of such a one it can be worth his while to expend his energy or his heart.

Esmond was published in 1852. It was not till 1858, some time after he had returned from his lecturing tours, that he published the sequel called *The Virginians*. It was first brought out in twenty-four monthly numbers, and ran through the years 1858 and 1859, Messrs. Bradbury and Evans having been the publishers. It takes up by no means the story of *Esmond*, and hardly the characters. The twin lads, who are called the Virginians, and whose name is Warrington, are grandsons of Esmond and his wife Lady Castlewood. Their one daughter, born at the estate in Virginia, had married a Warrington, and the Virginians are the issue of that marriage. In the story, one is sent to England, there to make his way; and the other is for a while supposed to have been killed by the Indians. How he was not killed, but after awhile comes again forward in the world of fiction, will be found in the story, which it is not our purpose to set forth here. The most interesting part of the narrative is that which tells us of the later fortunes of Madame Beatrix—the Baroness Bernstein—the lady who had in her youth been Beatrix Esmond, who had then condescended to become Mrs. Tusher, the tutor's wife, whence she rose to be the "lady" of a bishop, and, after the bishop had been put to rest under a load of

marble, had become the baroness—a rich old woman, courted by all her relatives because of her wealth.

In *The Virginians*, as a work of art, is discovered, more strongly than had shown itself yet in any of his works, that propensity to wandering which came to Thackeray because of his idleness. Is, I think, to be found in every book he ever wrote—except *Esmond;* but is here more conspicuous than it had been in his earlier years. Though he can settle himself down to his pen and ink—not always even to that without a struggle, but to that with sufficient burst of energy to produce a large average amount of work—he cannot settle himself down to the task of contriving a story. There have been those—and they have not been bad judges of literature—who have told me that they have best liked these vague narratives. The mind of the man has been clearly exhibited in them. In them he has spoken out his thoughts, and given the world to know his convictions, as well as could have been done in the carrying out any well-conducted plot. And though the narratives be vague, the characters are alive. In *The Virginians*, the two young men and their mother, and the other ladies with whom they have to deal, and especially their aunt, the Baroness Bernstein, are all alive. For desultory reading, for that picking up of a volume now and again which requires permission to forget the plot of a novel, this novel is admirably adapted. There is not a page of it vacant or dull. But he who takes it up to read as a whole, will find that it is the work of a desultory writer, to whom it is not unfrequently difficult to remember the incidents of his own narrative. "How good it is, even as it is!—but if he would have done his best for us, what might he not have done!" This, I think, is what we feel when we read *The Virginians*. The author's mind has in one way been active enough—and powerful, as it always is; but he has been unable to fix it to an intended purpose, and has gone on from day to day furthering the difficulty he has intended to master, till the book, under the stress of circumstances—demands for copy and the like—has been completed before the difficulty has even in truth been encountered.

CHAPTER VI.

THACKERAY'S BURLESQUES.

As so much of Thackeray's writing partakes of the nature of burlesque, it would have been unnecessary to devote a separate chapter to the subject, were it not that there are among his tales two or three so exceedingly good of their kind, coming so entirely up to our idea of what a prose burlesque should be, that were I to omit to mention them I should pass over a distinctive portion of our author's work.

The volume called *Burlesques*, published in 1869, begins with the *Novels by Eminent Hands*, and *Jeames's Diary*, to which I have already alluded. It contains also *The Tremendous Adventures of Major Gahagan*, *A Legend of the Rhine*, and *Rebecca and Rowena*. It is of these that I will now speak. *The History of the Next French Revolution* and *Cox's Diary*, with which the volume is concluded, are, according to my thinking, hardly equal to the others; nor are they so properly called burlesques.

Nor will I say much of Major Gahagan, though his adventures are very good fun. He is a warrior—that is, of course—and he is one in whose wonderful narrative all that distant India can produce in the way of boasting, is superadded to Ireland's best efforts in the same line. Baron Munchausen was nothing to him; and to the bare and simple miracles of the baron is joined that humour without which Thackeray never tells any story. This is broad enough, no doubt, but is still humour—as when the major tells us that he always kept in his own apartment a small store of gunpowder; "always keeping it under my bed, with a candle burning for fear of accidents." Or when he describes his courage; "I was running—running as the brave stag before the hounds—running, as I have done a great number of times in my life, when there was no help for it but a run." Then he tells us of his digestion. "Once in Spain I ate the leg of a horse, and was so eager to swallow this morsel, that I bolted the shoe as well as the hoof, and never felt the slightest inconvenience from either." He storms a citadel, and has only a snuff-box given him for his reward. "Never mind," says Major Gahagan; "when they want me to storm a fort again, I shall know better." By which we perceive that the major remembered his Horace, and had in his mind the soldier who had lost his purse. But the major's adventures, excellent as they are,

lack the continued interest which is attached to the two following stories.

Of what nature is the *Legend of the Rhine*, we learn from the commencement. "It was in the good old days of chivalry, when every mountain that bathes its shadow in the Rhine had its castle; not inhabited as now by a few rats and owls, nor covered with moss and wallflowers and funguses and creeping ivy. No, no; where the ivy now clusters there grew strong portcullis and bars of steel; where the wallflowers now quiver in the ramparts there were silken banners embroidered with wonderful heraldry; men-at-arms marched where now you shall only see a bank of moss or a hideous black champignon; and in the place of the rats and owlets, I warrant me there were ladies and knights to revel in the great halls, and to feast and dance, and to make love there." So that we know well beforehand of what kind will this story be. It will be a pure romance—burlesqued. "Ho seneschal, fill me a cup of hot liquor; put sugar in it, good fellow; yea, and a little hot water—but very little, for my soul is sad as I think of those days and knights of old."

A knight is riding alone on his war-horse, with all his armour with him—and his luggage. His rank is shown by the name on his portmanteau, and his former address and present destination by a card which was attached. It had run, "Count Ludwig de Hombourg, Jerusalem, but the name of the Holy City had been dashed out with the pen, and that of Godesberg substituted." "By St. Hugo of Katzenellenbogen," said the good knight, shivering, "'tis colder here than at Damascus. Shall I be at Godesberg in time for dinner?" He has come to see his friend Count Karl, Margrave of Godesberg.

But at Godesberg everything is in distress and sorrow. There is a new inmate there, one Sir Gottfried, since whose arrival the knight of the castle has become a wretched man, having been taught to believe all evils of his wife, and of his child Otto, and a certain stranger, one Hildebrandt. Gottfried, we see with half an eye, has done it all. It is in vain that Ludwig de Hombourg tells his old friend Karl that this Gottfried is a thoroughly bad fellow, that he had been found to be a card-sharper in the Holy Land, and had been drummed out of his regiment. "'Twas but some silly quarrel over the wine-cup," says Karl. "Hugo de Brodenel would have no black bottle on the board." We think we can remember the quarrel of "Brodenel" and the black bottle, though so many things have taken place since that.

There is a festival in the castle, and Hildebrandt comes with the other guests. Then Ludwig's attention is called by poor Karl, the father, to a certain family likeness. Can it be that he is not the father of his own child? He is playing cards with his friend Ludwig when that traitor Gottfried comes and whispers to him, and makes an appointment. "I will be there too," thought Count Ludwig, the good Knight of Hombourg.

On the next morning, before the stranger knight had shaken off

his slumbers, all had been found out and everything done. The lady had been sent to a convent and her son to a monastery. The knight of the castle has no comfort but in his friend Gottfried, a distant cousin who is to inherit everything. All this is told to Sir Ludwig—who immediately takes steps to repair the mischief. "A cup of coffee straight," says he to the servitors. "Bid the cook pack me a sausage and bread in paper, and the groom saddle Streithengst. We have far to ride." So this redresser of wrongs starts off, leaving the Margrave in his grief.

Then there is a great fight between Sir Ludwig and Sir Gottfried, admirably told in the manner of the later chroniclers—a hermit sitting by and describing everything almost as well as Rebecca did on the tower. Sir Ludwig being in the right, of course gains the day. But the escape of the fallen knight's horse is the cream of this chapter. "Away, ay, away!—away amid the green vineyards and golden cornfields; away up the steep mountains, where he frightened the eagles in their eyries; away down the clattering ravines, where the flashing cataracts tumble; away through the dark pine-forests, where the hungry wolves are howling; away over the dreary wolds, where the wild wind walks alone; away through the splashing quagmires, where the will-o'-the-wisp slunk frightened among the reeds; away through light and darkness, storm and sunshine; away by tower and town, highroad and hamlet. . . . Brave horse! gallant steed! snorting child of Araby! On went the horse, over mountains, rivers, turnpikes, applewomen; and never stopped until he reached a livery-stable in Cologne, where is master was accustomed to put him up!"

The conquered knight, Sir Gottfried, of course reveals the truth. This Hildebrandt is no more than the lady's brother—as it happened a brother in disguise—and hence the likeness. Wicked knights, when they die, always divulge their wicked secrets, and this knight Gottfried does so now. Sir Ludwig carries the news home to the afflicted husband and father; who of course instantly sends off messengers for his wife and son. The wife won't come. All she wants is to have her dresses and jewels sent to her. Of so cruel a husband she has had enough. As for the son, he has jumped out of a boat on the Rhine, as he was being carried to his monastery, and was drowned!

But he was not drowned, but had only dived. "The gallant boy swam on beneath the water, never lifting his head for a single moment between Godesberg and Cologne; the distance being twenty-five or thirty miles."

Then he becomes an archer, dressed in green from head to foot. How it was is all told in the story; and he goes to shoot for a prize at the Castle of Adolf the Duke of Cleeves. On his way he shoots a raven marvellously—[illegible] as marvellously as did Robin Hood the twig in Ivanhoe. Then one of his companions is married, or nearly married, to the mysterious "Lady of Windeck"—would have been married but for Otto, and that the bishop and dean, who were dragged up from their long-ago graves to perform

the ghostly ceremony, were prevented by the ill-timed mirth of a certain old canon of the church named Schidnischmidt. The reader has to read the name out loud before he recognises an old friend. But this of the Lady of Windeck is an episode.

How at the shooting-match, which of course ensued, Otto shot for and won the heart of a fair lady, the duke's daughter, need not be told here, nor how he quarrelled with the Rowski of Donnerblitz—the hideous and sulky, but rich and powerful, nobleman who had come to take the hand, whether he could win the heart or not, of the daughter of the duke. It is all arranged according to the proper and romantic order. Otto, though he enlists in the duke's archer-guard as simple soldier, contrives to fight with the Rowski de Donnerblitz, Margrave of Eulenschrenkenstein, and of course kills him. "'Yield, yield, Sir Rowski!' shouted he, in a calm voice. A blow dealt madly at his head was the reply. It was the last blow that the Count of Eulenschrenkenstein ever struck in battle. The curse was on his lips as the crashing steel descended into his brain and split it in two. He rolled like a dog from his horse, his enemy's knee was in a moment on his chest, and the dagger of mercy at his throat, as the knight once more called upon him to yield." The knight was of course the archer who had come forward as an unknown champion, and had touched the Rowski's shield with the point of his lance. For this story, as well as the rest, is a burlesque on our dear old favourite Ivanhoe.

That everything goes right at last, that the wife comes back from her monastery, and joins her jealous husband, and that the duke's daughter has always, in truth, known that the poor archer was a noble knight—these things are all matters of course.

But the best of the three burlesques is *Rebecca and Rowena, or A Romance upon Romance*, which I need not tell my readers is a continuation of *Ivanhoe*. Of this burlesque it is the peculiar characteristic that, while it has been written to ridicule the persons and the incidents of that perhaps the most favourite novel in the English language, it has been so written that it would not have offended the author had he lived to read it, nor does it disgust or annoy those who most love the original. There is not a word in it having an intention to belittle Scott. It has sprung from the genuine humour created in Thackeray's mind by his aspect of the romantic. We remember how reticent, how dignified was Rowena —how cold we perhaps thought her, whether there was so little of that billing and cooing, that kissing and squeezing, between her and Ivanhoe which we used to think necessary to lovers' blisses. And there was left, too, on our minds an idea that Ivanhoe had liked the Jewess almost as well as Rowena, and that Rowena might possibly have become jealous. Thackeray's mind at once went to work and pictured to him a Rowena such as such a woman might become after marriage; and as Ivanhoe was of a melancholy nature and apt to be hipped, and grave, and silent, as a matter of course Thackeray presumes him to have been henpecked after his marriage.

Our dear Wamba disturbs his mistress in some devotional conversation with her chaplain, and the stern lady orders that the fool shall have three-dozen lashes. "I got you out of Front de Bœuf's castle," said poor Wamba, piteously appealing to Sir Wilfrid of Ivanhoe, "and canst thou not save me from the lash?"

"Yes; from Front de Bœuf's castle, *when you were locked up with the Jewess in the tower!*" said Rowena, haughtily replying to the timid appeal of her husband. "Gurth, give him four-dozen" —and this was all poor Wamba got by applying for the mediation of his master. Then the satirist moralises: "Did you ever know a right minded woman pardon another for being handsomer and more love-worthy than herself?" Rowena is "always flinging Rebecca into Ivanhoe's teeth;" and altogether life at Rotherwood, as described by the later chronicles, is not very happy even when most domestic. Ivanhoe becomes sad and moody. He takes to drinking, and his lady does not forget to tell him of it. "Ah, dear axe!" he exclaims, apostrophising his weapon, "ah, gentle steel! that was a merry time when I sent thee crashing into the pate of the Emir Abdul Melek!" There was nothing left to him but his memories; and "in a word, his life was intolerable." So he determines that he will go and look after King Richard, who of course was wandering abroad. He anticipates a little difficulty with his wife; but she is only too happy to let him go, comforting herself with the idea that Athelstane will look after her. So her husband starts on his journey. "Then Ivanhoe's trumpet blew. Then Rowena waved her pocket-handkerchief. Then the household gave a shout. Then the pursuivant of the good knight, Sir Wilfrid the Crusader, flung out his banner—which was argent, a gules cramoisy with three Moors impaled—then Wamba gave a lash on his mule's haunch, and Ivanhoe, heaving a great sigh, turned the tail of his war-horse upon the castle of his fathers."

Ivanhoe finds Cœur de Leon besieging the Castle of Chalons, and there they both do wondrous deeds, Ivanhoe always surpassing the king. The jealousy of the courtiers, the ingratitude of the king, and the melancholy of the knight, who is never comforted except when he has slaughtered some hundreds, are delighted. Roger de Backbite and Peter de Toadhole are intended to be quite real. Then his majesty sings, passing off as his own a song of Charles Lever's. Sir Wilfrid declares the truth, and twits the king with his falsehood, whereupon he has the guitar thrown at his head for his pains. He catches the guitar, however, gracefully in his left hand, and sings his own immortal ballad of *King Canute*—than which Thackeray never did anything better.

"Might I stay the sun above us, good Sir Bishop?" Canute cried;
"Could I bid the silver moon to pause upon her heavenly ride?
If the moon obeys my orders, sure I can command the tide.

Will the advancing waves obey me, Bishop, if I make the sign?"
Said the bishop, bowing lowly: "Land and sea, my lord, are thine."
Canute turned towards the ocean: "Back," he said "thou foaming brine."

But the sullen ocean answered with a louder, deeper roar,
And the rapid waves drew nearer, falling, sounding on the shore;
Back the keeper and the bishop, back the king and courtiers bore.

We must go to the book to look at the picture of the king as he is killing the youngest of the sons of the Count of Chalons. Those illustrations of Doyle's are admirable. The size of the king's head, and the size of his battle-axe as contrasted with the size of the child, are burlesque all over. But the king has been wounded by a bolt from the bow of Sir Bertrand de Gourdon while he is slaughtering the infant, and there is an end of him. Ivanhoe, too, is killed at the siege—Sir Robert de Backbite having stabbed him in the back during the scene. Had he not been then killed, his widow Rowena could not have married Athelstane, which she soon did after hearing the sad news; nor could he have had that celebrated epitaph in Latin and English:

Hic est Guilfridus, belli dum vixit avidus.
Cum gladeo et lancea Normannia et quoque Francia
Verbera dura dabat. Per Turcos multum equitabat.
Guilbertum occidit;—atque Hyerosolyma vidit.
Heu! nunc sub fossa sunt tanti militis ossa.
Uxor Athelstani est conjux castissima Thani.*

The translation, we are told, was by Wamba:

Under the stone you behold,
Buried and coffined and cold,
Lieth Sir Wilfrid the Bold.

Always he marched in advance,
Warring in Flanders and France,
Doughty with sword and with lance.

Famous in Saracen fight,
Rode in his youth, the good Knight,
Scattering Paynims in flight,

Brian, the Templar untrue,
Fairly in tourney he slew;
Saw Hierusalem too.

Now he is buried and gone,
Lying beneath the gray stone.
Where shall you find such a one?

Long time his widow deplored,
Weeping, the fate of her lord,
Sadly cut off by the sword.

When she was eased of her pain,
Came the good lord Athelstane,
When her ladyship married again.

The next chapter begins naturally as follows: "I trust nobody will suppose, from the events described in the last chapter, that our friend Ivanhoe is really dead." He is of course cured of his wounds, though they take six years in the curing. And then he makes his way back to Rotherwood, in a friar's disguise, much as he did on that former occasion when we first met him, and there is

* I doubt that Thackeray did not write the Latin epitaph, but I hardly dare suggest the name of any author. The "vixit avidus" is quite worthy of Thackeray; but had he tried his hand at such mode of expression he would have done more of it. I should like to know whether he had been in company with Father Prout at the time.

received by Athelstane and Rowena—and their boy!—while Wamba sings him a song:

> Then you know the worth of a lass,
> Once you have come to forty year!

No one, of course, but Wamba knows Ivanhoe, who roams about the country, melancholy—as he of course would be—charitable—as he perhaps might be—for we are specially told that he had a large fortune and nothing to do with it, and slaying robbers wherever he met them—but sad at heart all the time. Then there came a little burst of the author's own feelings, while he is burlesquing. "Ah my dear friends and British public, are there not others who are melancholy under a mask of gayety, and who in the midst of crowds are lonely? Liston was a most melancholy man; Grimaldi had feelings; and then others I wot of. But psha!—let us have the next chapter." In all of which there was a touch of earnestness.

Ivanhoe's griefs were enhanced by the wickedness of King John, under whom he would not serve. "It was Sir Wilfrid of Ivanhoe, I need scarcely say, who got the Barons of England to league together and extort from the king that famous instrument and palladium of our liberties, at present in the British Museum, Great Russell Street, Bloomsbury—The Magna Charta." Athelstane also quarrels with the king, whose orders he disobeys, and Rotherwood is attacked by the royal army. No one was of real service in the way of fighting except Ivanhoe—and how could he take up that cause? "No; he hanged to me," said the knight, bitterly. "This is a quarrel in which I can't interfere. Common politeness forbids. Let yonder ale-swilling Athelstane defend his—ha, ha!—*wife;* and my Lady Rowena guard her—ha, ha!—*son!*" and he laughed wildly and madly.

But Athelstane is killed—this time in earnest—and then Ivanhoe rushes to the rescue. He finds Gurth dead at the park-lodge; and though he is alone—having outridden his followers—he rushes up the chestnut avenue to the house, which is being attacked. "An Ivanhoe! an Ivanhoe!" he bellowed out with a shout that overcame all the din of battle;—"Notre Dame à la recousse!" and to hurl his lance through the midriff of Reginald de Bracy, who was commanding the assault—who fell howling with anguish—to wave his battle-axe over his own head, and to cut off those thirteen men-at-arms, was the work of an instant. "An Ivanhoe! an Ivanhoe!" he still shouted, and down went a man as sure as he said "hoe!"

Nevertheless he is again killed by multitudes, or very nearly—and has again to be cured by the tender nursing of Wamba. But Athelstane is really dead, and Rowena and the boy have to be found. He does his duty and finds them—just in time to be present at Rowena's death. She has been put in prison by King John, and is in extremis when her first husband gets to her. "Wilfrid, my

early loved," * slowly gasped she, removing her gray hair from her furrowed temples, and gazing on her boy fondly as he nestled on Ivanhoe's knee—"promise me by St. Waltheof of Templestowe—promise me one boon!"

"I do," said Ivanhoe, clasping the boy, and thinking that it was to that little innocent that the promise was intended to apply.

"By St. Waltheof?"

"By St. Waltheof!"

"Promise me, then," gasped Rowena, staring wildly at him, "that you will never marry a Jewess!"

"By St. Waltheof!" cried Ivanhoe, "but this is too much," and he did not make the promise.

"Having placed young Cedric at school at the Hall of Dotheboys, in Yorkshire, and arranged his family affairs, Sir Wilfrid of Ivanhoe quitted a country which had no longer any charm for him, as there was no fighting to be done, and in which his stay was rendered less agreeable by the notion that King John would hang him." So he goes forth and fights again, in league with the Knights of St. John—the Templars naturally having a dislike to him because of Brian de Bois Guilbert. "The only fault that the great and gallant, though severe and ascetic Folko of Heydenbraten, the chief of the Order of St. John, found with the melancholy warrior whose lance did such service to the cause, was that he did not persecute the Jews, as so religious a knight should. So the Jews, in cursing Christains, always excepted the name of the Desdichado—or the double disinherited, as he now was—the Desdichado Doblado." Then came the battle of Alarcos, and the Moors were all but in possession of the whole of Spain. Sir Wilfrid, like other good Christians, cannot endure this, so he takes ship in Bohemia, where he happens to be quartered, and has himself carried to Barcelona, and proceeds "to slaughter the Moors forthwith." Then there is a scene in which Isaac of York comes on as a messenger, to ransom from a Spanish knight, Don Beltram de Cuchilla y Trabuco, y Espada, y Espelon, a little Moorish girl. The Spanish knight of course murders the little girl instead of taking the ransom. Two hundred thousand dirhems are offered, however much that may be; but the knight, who happens to be in funds at the time, prefers to kill the little girl. All this is only necessary to the story as introducing Isaac of York. Sir Wilfrid is of course intent upon finding Rebecca. Through all his troubles and triumphs, from his gaining and his losing of Rowena, from the day on which he had been "*locked up with the Jewess in the tower*," he had always been true to her. "Away from me!" said the old Jew, tottering. "Away, Rebecca is—dead!" Then Ivanhoe goes out and kills fifty thousand Moors, and there is the picture of him—killing them.

But Rebecca is not dead at all. Her father had said so because Rebecca had behaved very badly to him. She had refused to marry

* There is something almost illnatured in his treatment of Rowena, who is very false in her declarations of love;—and it is to be feared that by Rowena the author intends the normal married lady of English society.

the Moorish prince, or any of her own people, the Jews, and had gone as far as to declare her passion for Ivanhoe and her resolution to be a Christian. All the Jews and Jewesses in Valencia turned against her—so that she was locked up in the back-kitchen and almost starved to death. But Ivanhoe found her, of course, and makes her Mrs. Ivanhoe, or Lady Wilfrid the second. Then Thackeray tells us how for many years he, Thackeray, had not ceased to feel that it ought to be so. "Indeed I have thought of it these five-and-twenty years—ever since, as a boy at school, I commenced the noble study of novels—ever since the day when, lying on sunny slopes, of half-holidays, the fair chivalrous figures and beautiful shapes of knights and ladies were visible to me, ever since I grew to love Rebecca, that sweetest creature of the poet's fancy, and longed to see her righted."

And so, no doubt, it had been. The very burlesque had grown from the way in which his young imagination had been moved by Scott's romance. He had felt, from the time of those happy half-holidays in which he had been lucky enough to get hold of the novel, that according to all laws of poetic justice, Rebecca, as being the more beautiful and the more interesting of the heroines, was entitled to the possession of the hero. We have all of us felt the same. But to him had been present at the same time all that is ludicrous in our ideas of middle-age chivalry; the absurdity of its recorded deeds, the bloodthirstiness of its recreations, the selfishness of its men, the falseness of its honour, the cringing of its loyalty, the tyranny of its princes. And so there came forth Rebecca and Rowena, all broad fun from beginning to end, but never without a purpose—the best burlesque, as I think, in our language.

CHAPTER VII.

THACKERAY'S LECTURES.

In speaking of Thackeray's life, I have said why and how it was that he took upon himself to lecture, and have also told the reader that he was altogether successful in carrying out the views proposed to himself. Of his peculiar manner of lecturing I have said but little, never having heard him. "He pounded along—very clearly," I have been told; from which I surmise that there was no special grace of eloquence, but that he was always audible. I cannot imagine that he should have been ever eloquent. He could not have taken the trouble necessary with his voice, with his cadences, or with his outward appearance. I imagine that they who seem so naturally to fall into the proprieties of elocution have generally taken a great deal of trouble beyond that which the mere finding of their words has cost them. It is clearly to the matter of what he then gave the world, and not to the manner, that we must look for what interest is to be found in the lectures.

Those on *The English Humorists* were given first. The second set was on *The Four Georges*. In the volume now before us *The Georges* are printed first, and the whole is produced simply as a part of Thackeray's literary work. Looked at, however, in that light, the merit of the two sets of biographical essays is very different. In the one we have all the anecdotes which could be brought together respecting four of our kings—who as men were not peculiar, though their reigns were, and will always be, famous, because the country during the period was increasing greatly in prosperity, and was ever strengthening the hold it had upon its liberties. In the other set the lecturer was a man of letters dealing with men of letters, and himself a prince among humorists of his own country and language. One could not imagine a better subject for such discourses from Thackeray's mouth than the latter. The former was not, I think, so good.

In discussing the lives of kings the biographer may trust to personal details or to historical facts. He may take the man, and say what good or evil may be said of him as a man;—or he may take the period, and tell his readers what happened to the country while this or the other king was on the throne. In the case with which we are dealing, the lecturer had not time enough or room

enough for real history. His object was to let his audience know of what nature were the men; and we are bound to say that the pictures have not, on the whole, been flattering. It was almost necessary that with such a subject such could be the result. A story of family virtues, with princes and princesses well brought up, with happy family relations, all couleur de rose—as it would of course become us to write if we were dealing with the life of a living sovereign—would not be interesting. No one on going to hear Thackeray lecture on the Georges expected that. There must be some piquancy given, or the lecture would be dull;—and the eulogy of personal virtues can seldom be piquant. It is difficult to speak fittingly of a sovereign, either living or not, long since gone. You can hardly praise such a one without flattery. You can hardly censure him without injustice. We are either ignorant of his personal doings or we know them as secrets, which have been divulged for the most part either falsely or treacherously—often both falsely and treacherously. It is better, perhaps, that we should not deal with the personalities of princes.

I believe that Thackeray fancied that he had spoken well of George III., and am sure that it was his intention to do so. But the impression he leaves is poor. "He is said not to have cared for Shakespeare or tragedy much; farces and pantomimes were his joy;—and especially when clown swallowed a carrot or a string of sausages, he would laugh so outrageously that the lovely princess by his side would have to say, 'My gracious monarch, do compose yourself.' 'George, be a king!' were the words which she —his mother—"was ever croaking in the ears of her son; and the king the simple, stubborn, affectionate, bigoted man tried to be." "He did his best; he worked according to his lights; what virtues he knew he tried to practise; what knowledge he could master he strove to acquire." If the lectures were to be popular, it was absolutely necessary that they should be written in this strain. A lecture simply laudatory on the life of St. Paul would not draw even the bench of bishops to listen to it; but were a flaw found in the apostle's life, the whole Church of England would be bound to know all about it. I am quite sure that Thackeray believed every word that he said in the lectures, and that he intended to put in the good and the bad, honestly, as they might come to his hand. We may be quite sure that he did not intend to flatter the royal family;—equally sure that he would not calumniate. There were, however, so many difficulties to be encountered that I cannot but think that the subject was ill-chosen. In making them so amusing as he did, and so little offensive, great ingenuity was shown.

I will now go back to the first series, in which the lectures treated of Swift, Congreve, Addison, Steele, Prior, Gay, Pope, Hogarth, Smollett, Fielding, Sterne, and Goldsmith. All these Thackeray has put in their proper order, placing the men from the date of their birth, except Prior, who was in truth the eldest of the lot, but whom it was necessary to depose, in order that the great Swift might stand first on the list, and Smollett, who was not born

till fourteen years after Fielding, eight years after Sterne, and who has been moved up, I presume, simply from caprice. From the birth of the first to the death of the last, was a period of nearly a hundred years. They were never absolutely all alive together; but it was nearly so, Addison and Prior having died before Smollett was born. Whether we should accept as humorists the full catalogue, may be a question; though we shall hardly wish to eliminate any one from such a dozen of names. Pope we should hardly define as a humorist, were we to be seeking for a definition specially fit for him, though we shall certainly not deny the gift of humour to the author of *The Rape of the Lock*, or to the translator of any portion of *The Odyssey*. Nor should we have included Fielding or Smollett, in spite of Parson Adams and Tabitha Bramble, unless anxious to fill a good company. That Hogarth was specially a humorist no one will deny; but in speaking of humorists we should have presumed, unless otherwise notified, that humorists in letters only had been intended. As Thackeray explains clearly that he means by a humorist, I may as well here repeat the passage: "If humour only meant laughter, you would scarcely feel more interest about humorous writers than about the private life of poor Harlequin just mentioned, who possesses in common with these the power of making you laugh. But the men regarding whose lives and stories your kind presence here shows that you have curiosity and sympathy, appeal to a great number of our other faculties, besides our mere sense of ridicule. The humorous writer professes to awaken and direct your love, your pity, your kindness—your scorn for untruth, pretension, imposture—your tenderness for the weak, the poor, the oppressed, the unhappy. To the best of his means and ability he comments on all the ordinary actions and passions of life almost. He takes upon himself to be the week-day preacher, so to speak. Accordingly, as he finds, and speaks, and feels the truth best, we regard him, esteem him,—sometimes love him. And as his business is to mark other people's lives and peculiarities, we moralise upon *his* life when he is gone—and yesterday's preacher becomes the text for to-day's sermon."

Having thus explained his purpose, Thackeray begins his task, and puts Swift in his front rank as a humorist. The picture given of this great man has very manifestly the look of truth, and if true, is terrible indeed. We do, in fact, know it to be true—even though it be admitted that there is still room left for a book to be written on the life of the fearful dean. Here was a man endued with an intellect pellucid as well as brilliant; who could not only conceive but see also—with some fine instincts too; whom fortune did not flout; whom circumstances fairly served; but who, from first to last, was miserable himself, who made others miserable, and who deserved misery. Our business, during the page or two which we can give to the subject, is not with Swift, but with Thackeray's picture of Swift. It is painted with colours terribly strong and with shadows fearfully deep. "Would you like to have lived with him?" Thackeray asks. Then he says how pleasant it would have

been to have passed some time with Fielding, Johnson, or Goldsmith. "I should like to have been Shakespeare's shoeblack," he says. "But Swift! If you had been his inferior in parts—and that, with a great respect for all persons present, I fear is only very likely—his equal in mere social station, he would have bullied, scorned, and insulted you. If, undeterred by his great reputation, you had met him like a man, he would have quailed before you and not had the pluck to reply—and gone home, and years after written a foul epigram upon you." There is a picture! "If you had been a lord with a blue riband, who flattered his vanity, or could help his ambition, he would have been the most delightful company in the world. . . . How he would have torn your enemies to pieces for you, and made fun of the Opposition! His servility was so boisterous that it looked like independence." He was a man whose mind was never fixed on high things, but was striving always after something which, little as it might be, and successful as he was, should always be out of his reach. It had been his misfortune to become a clergyman, because the way to church preferment seemed to be the readiest. He became, as we all know, a dean—but never a bishop, and was therefore wretched. Thackeray describes him as a clerical highwayman, seizing on all he could get. But "the great prize has not yet come. The coach with the mitre and crozier in it, which he intends to have for *his* share, has been delayed on the way from St. James's; and he waits and waits till nightfall, when his runners come and tell him that the coach has taken a different way and escaped him. So he fires his pistol into the air with a curse, and rides away into his own country;"—or, in other words, takes a poor deanery in Ireland.

Thackeray explains very correctly, as I think, the nature of the weapons which the man used—namely, the words and style with which he wrote. "That Swift was born at No. 7, Hoey's Court, Dublin, on November 30, 1667, is a certain fact, of which nobody will deny the sister-island the honour and glory; but it seems to me he was no more an Irishman than a man born of English parents at Calcutta is a Hindoo. Goldsmith was an Irishman, and always an Irishman; Steele was an Irishman, and always an Irishman; Swift's heart was English and in England, his habits English, his logic eminently English; his statement is elaborately simple; he shuns tropes and metaphors, and uses his ideas and words with a wise thrift and economy, as he used his money;—with which he could be generous and splendid upon great occasions, but which he husbanded when there was no need to spend it. He never indulges in needless extravagance of rhetoric, lavish epithets, profuse imagery. He lays his opinions before you with a grave simplicity and a perfect neatness." This is quite true of him, and the result is that though you may deny him sincerity, simplicity, humanity, or good taste, you can hardly find fault with his language.

Swift was a clergyman, and this is what Thackeray says of him in regard to his sacred profession. "I know of few things more conclusive as to the sincerity of Swift's religion, than his advice to

poor John Gay to turn clergyman, and look out for a seat on the Bench! Gay, the author of *The Beggar's Opera;* Gay, the wildest of the wits about town! It was this man that Jonathan Swift advised to take orders, to mount in a cassock and bands—just as he advised him to husband his shillings, and put his thousand pounds out to interest."

It was not that he was without religion—or without, rather, his religious beliefs and doubts, "for Swift," says Thackeray, "was a reverent, was a pious spirit. For Swift could love and could pray." Left to himself and to the natural thoughts of his mind, without those "orders" to which he had bound himself as a necessary part of his trade, he could have turned to his God with questionings which need not then have been heart breaking. "It is my belief," says Thackeray, "that he suffered frightfully from the consciousness of his own scepticism, and that he had bent his pride so far down as to put his apostasy out to hire." I doubt whether any of Swift's works are very much read now, but perhaps Gulliver's travels are oftener in the hands of modern readers than any other. Of all the satires in our language, it is probably the most cynical, the most absolutely illnatured, and therefore the falsest. Let those who care to form an opinion of Swift's mind from the best known of his works, turn to Thackeray's account of Gulliver. I can imagine no greater proof of misery than to have been able to write such a book as that.

It is thus that the lecturer concludes his lecture about Swift: "He shrank away from all affections sooner or later. Stella and Vanessa both died near him, and away from him. He had not heart enough to see them die. He broke from his fastest friend, Sheridan. He slunk away from his fondest admirer, Pope. His laugh jars on one's ear after seven-score years. He was always alone—alone and gnashing in the darkness, except when Stella's sweet smile came and shone on him. When that went, silence and utter night closed over him. An immense genius, an awful downfall and ruin! So great a man he seems to me, that thinking of him is like thinking of an empire falling. We have other great names to mention—none, I think, however so great or so gloomy." And so we pass on from Swift, feeling that though the man was certainly a humorist, we have had as yet but little to do with humour.

Congreve is the next who, however truly he may have been a humorist, is described here rather as a man of fashion. A man of fashion he certainly was, but is best known in our literature as a comedian—worshipping that Comic Muse to whom Thackeray hesitates to introduce his audience, because she is not only merry, but shameless also. Congreve's muse was about as bad as any muse that ever misbehaved herself—and I think, as little amusing. "Reading in these plays now," says Thackeray, "is like shutting your ears and looking at people dancing. What does it mean?—the measures, the grimaces, the bowing, shuffling, and retreating, the cavaliers seul advancing upon those ladies—those ladies and

men twirling round at the end in a mad galop, after which everybody bows and the quaint rite is celebrated?" It is always so with Congreve's plays, and Etherege's and Wycherley's. The world we meet there is not our world, and as we read the plays we have no sympathy with these unknown people. It was not that they lived so long ago. They are much nearer to us in time than the men and women who figured on the stage in the reign of James I. But their nature is farther from our nature. They sparkle, but never warm. They are witty, but leave no impression. I might almost go further, and say that they are wicked, but never allure. "When Voltaire came to visit the great Congreve," says Thackeray, "the latter rather affected to despise his literary reputation; and in this, perhaps, the great Congreve was not far wrong. A touch of Steele's tenderness is worth all his finery; a flash of Swift's lightning, a beam of Addison's pure sunshine, and his tawdry playhouse taper is invisible. But the ladies loved him, and he was undoubtedly a pretty fellow."

There is no doubt as to the true humour of Addison, who next comes up before us, but I think that he makes hardly so good a subject for a lecturer as the great gloomy man of intellect, or the frivolous man of pleasure. Thackeray tells us all that is to be said about him as a humorist in so few lines that I may almost insert them on this page: "But it is not for his reputation as the great author of *Cato* and *The Campaign*, or for his merits as Secretary of State, or for his rank and high distinction as Lady Warwick's husband, or for his eminence as an examiner of political questions on the Whig side, or a guardian of British liberties, that we admire Joseph Addison. It is as a Tattler of small talk and a Spectator of mankind that we cherish and love him, and owe as much pleasure to him as to any human being that ever wrote. He came in that artificial age, and began to speak with his noble natural voice. He came the gentle satirist, who hit no unfair blow; the kind judge, who castigated only in smiling. While Swift went about hanging and ruthless, a literary Jeffreys, in Addison's kind court only minor cases were tried;—only peccadilloes and small sins against society, only a dangerous libertinism in tuckers and hoops, or a nuisance in the abuse of beaux canes and snuffboxes." Steele set *The Tatler* a-going. "But with his friend's discovery of *The Tatler*, Addison's calling was found, and the most delightful Tattler in the world began to speak. He does not go very deep. Let gentlemen of a profound genius, critics accustomed to the plunge of the bathos, console themselves by thinking that he couldn't go very deep. There is no trace of suffering in his writing. He was so good, so honest, so healthy, so cheerfully selfish—if I must use the word!"

Such was Addison as a humorist; and when the hearer shall have heard also—or the reader read—that this most charming Tattler also wrote *Cato*, became a Secretary of State, and married a countess, he will have learned all that Thackeray had to tell of him.

Steele was one who stood much less high in the world's esteem, and who left behind him a much smaller name—but was quite Addison's equal as a humorist and a wit. Addison, though he had the reputation of a toper, was respectability itself. Steele was almost always disreputable. He was brought from Ireland, placed at the Charter House, and then transferred to Oxford, where he became acquainted with Addison. Thackeray says that "Steele found Addison a stately college don at Oxford." The stateliness and the don's rank were attributable no doubt to the more sober character of the English lad, for, in fact, the two men were born in the same year, 1672 Steele, who during his life was affected by various different tastes, first turned himself to literature, but early in life was bitten by the hue of a red coat and became a trooper in the Horse Guards. To the end he vacillated in the same way. In that charming paper in *The Tatler*, in which he records his father's death, his mother's griefs, his own most solemn and tender emotions, he says he is interrupted by the arrival of a hamper of wine, 'the same as is to be sold at Garraway's next week;' upon the receipt of which he sends for three friends, and they fall to instantly, drinking two bottles apiece, with great benefit to themselves, and not separating till two o'clock in the morning."

He had two wives, whom he loved dearly and treated badly. He hired grand houses, and bought fine horses for which he could never pay. He was often religious, but more often drunk. As a man of letters, other men of letters who followed him, such as Thackeray, could not be very proud of him. But everybody loved him; and he seems to have been the inventor of that flying literature which, with many changes in form and manner, has done so much for the amusement and edification of readers ever since his time. He was always commencing, or carrying on—often editing—some one of the numerous periodicals which appeared during his time. Thackeray mentions seven: *The Tatler*, *The Spectator*, *The Guardian*, *The Englishman*, *The Lover*, *The Reader*, and *The Theatre;* that three of them are well known to this day—the three first named—and are to be found in all libraries, is proof that his life was not thrown away.

I almost question Prior's right to be in the list, unless, indeed, the mastery over well-turned conceits is to be included within the border of humour. But Thackeray had a strong liking for Prior, and in his own humorous way rebukes his audience for not being familiar with *The Town and Country Mouse*. He says that Prior's epigrams have the genuine sparkle, and compares Prior to Horace. "His song, his philosophy, his good sense, his happy, easy turns and melody, his loves, and his epicureanism, bear a great resemblance to that most delightful and accomplished master." I cannot say that I agree with this. Prior is generally neat in his expression. Horace is happy—which is surely a great deal more.

All that is said of Gay, Pope, Hogarth, Smollett, and Fielding is worth reading, and may be of great value both to those who

have not time to study the authors, and to those who desire to have their own judgments somewhat guided, somewhat assisted. That they were all men of humor there can be no doubt. Whether either of them, except perhaps Gay, would have been specially ranked as a humorist among men of letters, may be a question.

Sterne was a humorist, and employed his pen in that line, if ever a writer did so, and so was Goldsmith. Of the excellence and largeness of the disposition of the one, and the meanness and littleness of the other, it is not necessary that I should here say much. But I will give a short passage from our author as to each. He has been quoting somewhat at length from Sterne, and thus he ends: "And with this pretty dance and chorus the volume artfully concludes. Even here one can't give the whole description. There is not a page in Sterne's writing but has something that were better away, a latent corruption—a hint as of an impure presence. Some of that dreary double entendre may be attributed to freer times and manners than ours—but not all. The four satyr's eyes leer out of the leaves constantly. The last words the famous author wrote were bad and wicked. The last lines the poor stricken wretch penned were for pity and pardon." Now a line or two about Goldsmith, and I will then let my reader go to the volume and study the lectures for himself. "The poor fellow was never so friendless but that he could befriend some one; never so pinched and wretched but he could give of his crust, and speak his word of compassion. If he had but his flute left, he would give that, and make the children happy in the dreary London courts."

Of this, too, I will remind my readers—those who have bookshelves well filled to adorn their houses—that Goldsmith stands in the front where all the young people see the volumes. There are few among the young people who do not refresh their sense of humour occasionally from that shelf; Sterne is relegated to some distant and high corner. The less often that he is taken down the better.—Thackeray makes some half excuse for him because of the greater freedom of the times. But "the times" were the same for the two. Both Sterne and Goldsmith wrote in the reign of George II.; both died in the reign of George III.

CHAPTER VIII.

THACKERAY'S BALLADS.

We have a volume of Thackeray's poems, republished under the name of *Ballads*, which is, I think, to a great extent a misnomer. They are all readable, almost all good, full of humour, and with some fine touches of pathos, most happy in their versification, and, with a few exceptions, hitting well on the head the nail which he intended to hit. But they are not on that account ballads. Literally, a ballad is a song; but it has come to signify a short chronicle in verse, which may be political, or pathetic, or grotesque—or it may have all three characteristics or any two of them; but not on that account is any grotesque poem a ballad—nor, of course, any pathetic or any political poem. *Jacob Omnium's Hoss* may fairly be called a ballad, containing as it does a chronicle of a well-defined transaction; and the story of *King Canute* is a ballad—one of the best that has been produced in our language in modern years. But such pieces as those called *The End of the Play* and *Vanitas Vanitatum*, which are didactic as well as pathetic, are not ballads in the common sense; nor are such songs as *The Mahogany Tree*, or the little collection called *Love Songs made Easy*. The majority of the pieces are not ballads; but if they be good of the kind, we should be ungrateful to quarrel much with the name.

How very good most of them are, I did not know till I re-read them for the purpose of writing this chapter. There is a manifest falling off in some few—which has come from that source of literary failure which is now so common. If a man write a book or a poem because it is in him to write it—the motive power being altogether in himself, and coming from his desire to express himself—he will write it well, presuming him to be capable of the effort. But if he write his book or poem simply because a book or poem is required from him, let his capability be what it may, it is not unlikely that he will do it badly. Thackeray occasionally suffered from the weakness thus produced. A ballad from *Policeman X—Bow Street Ballads* they were first called—was required by *Punch*, and had to be forthcoming, whatever might be the poet's humour, by a certain time. *Jacob Omnium's Hoss* is excellent. His heart and feeling were all there, on behalf of his friend, and against that obsolete old court of justice. But we can tell well when he was looking through

the police reports for a subject, and taking what chance might send him, without any special interest in the matter. *The Knight and the Lady of Bath*, and the *Damages Two Hundred Pounds*, as they were demanded at Guildford, taste as though they were written to order.

Here, in his verses as in his prose, the charm of Thackeray's work lies in the mingling of humour with pathos and indignation. There is hardly a piece that is not more or less funny, hardly a piece that is not satirical;—and in most of them, for those who will look a little below the surface, there is something that will touch them. Thackeray, though he rarely uttered a word, either with his pen or his mouth, in which there was not an intention to reach our sense of humour, never was only funny. When he was most determined to make us laugh, he had always a further purpose; some pity was to be extracted from us on behalf of the sorrows of men, or some indignation at the evil done by them.

This is the beginning of that story as to the *Two Hundred Pounds*, for which, as a ballad, I do not care very much:

> Special jurymen of England who admire your country's laws,
> And proclaim a British jury worthy of the nation's applause,
> Gaily compliment each other at the issue of a cause,
> Which was tried at Guildford 'sizes, this day week as ever was.

Here he is indignant, not only in regard to some miscarriage of justice on that special occasion, but at the general unfitness of jurymen for the work confided to them. "Gaily compliment yourselves," he says, "on your beautiful constitution, from which come such beautiful results as those I am going to tell you!" When he reminded us that Ivanhoe had produced Magna Charta, there was a purpose of irony even there in regard to our vaunted freedom. With all your Magna Charta and your juries, what are you but snobs! There is nothing so often misguided as general indignation, and I think that in his judgment of outside things, in the measure which he usually took of them, Thackeray was very frequently misguided. A satirist by trade will learn to satirise everything, till the light of the sun and the moon's loveliness will become evil and mean to him. I think that he was mistaken in his views of things. But we have to do with him as a writer, not as a political economist or a politician. His indignation was all true, and the expression of it was often perfect. The lines in which he addresses that Pallis Court, at the end of *Jacob Omnium's Hoss*, are almost sublime.

> O Pallis Court, you move
> My pity most profound.
> A most amusing sport
> You thought it, I'll be bound,
> To saddle hup a three-pound debt,
> With two-and-twenty pound.
>
> Good sport it is to you
> To grind the honest poor,
> To pay their just or unjust debts
> With eight hundred per cent., for Lor;
> Make haste and get your costes in,
> They will not last much mor!

Come down from that tribewn,
Thou shameless and unjust;
Thou swindle, picking pockets in
The name of Truth august;
Come down, thou hoary Blasphemy,
For die thou shalt and must.

And go it, Jacob Homnium,
And ply your iron pen,
And rise up, Sir John Jervis,
And shut me up that den;
That sty for fattening lawyers in,
On the bones of honest men.

"Come down from that tribewn, thou shameless and unjust!" It is impossible not to feel that he felt this as he wrote it.

There is a branch of his poetry which he calls—or which at any rate is now called, *Lyra Hybernica*, for which no doubt *The Groves of Blarney* was his model. There have been many imitations since, of which perhaps Barham's ballad on the coronation was the best, "When to Westminster the Royal Spinster and the Duke of Leinster all in order did repair!" Thackeray, in some of his attempts, has been equally droll and equally graphic. That on *The Cristal Palace*—not that at Sydenham, but its forerunner, the palace of the Great Exhibition—is very good, as the following catalogue of its contents will show t

There's holy saints
And window paints,
By Maydiayval Pugin;
Alhamborough Jones
Did paint the tones
Of yellow and gambouge in.

There's fountains there
And crosses fair;
There's water-gods with urns;
There's organs three,
To play, d'ye see?
"God save the Queen," by turns.

There's statues bright
Of marble white,
Of silver, and of copper;
And some in zinc,
And some, I think,
That isn't over proper.

There's staym ingynes,
That stands in lines,
Enormous and amazing,
That squeal and snort
Like whales in sport,
Or elephants a grazing.

There's carts and gigs,
And pins for pigs,
There's dibblers and there's harrows,
And ploughs like toys
For little boys,
And ilegant wheel-barrows.

For thim genteels
Who ride on wheels,
There's plenty to indulge 'em;
There's droskys snug
From Paytersbug,
And vayhycles from Bulgium.

There's cabs on stands
And shandthry danns;
There's waggons from New York here:
There's Lapland sleighs
Have crossed the seas,
And jaunting cyars from Cork here.

In writing this Thackeray was a little late with his copy for *Punch;* not, we should say, altogether an uncommon accident to him. It should have been with the editor early on Saturday, if not before, but did not come till late on Saturday evening. The editor, who was among men the most good-natured, and I should think the most forbearing, either could not, or in this case would not, insert it in the next week's issue, and Thackeray, angry and

disgusted, sent it to *The Times*. In *The Times* of next Monday it appeared—very much, I should think, to the delight of the readers of that august newspaper.

Mr. Molony's account of the ball given to the Nepaulese ambassadors by the Peninsular and Oriental Company, is so like Barham's coronation in the account it gives of the guests, that one would fancy it must be by the same hand.

The noble Chair * stud at the stair
And bade the dhrums to thump ; and he
Did thus evince to that Black Prince
The welcome of his Company.†

O fair the girls and rich the curls,
And bright the oys you saw there was;
And fixed each oye you then could spoi
On General Jung Bahawther was!

This gineral great then tuck his sate,
With all the other ginerals,
Bedad his troat, his belt, his coat,
All bleezed with precious minerals:
And as he there, with princely air,
Recloinin on his cushion was,
All round about his royal chair
The squeezin and the pushin was.

O Pat, such girls, such jukes and earls,
Such fashion and nobilitee!
Just think of Tim, and fancy him
Amidst the high gentilitee!
There was the Lord de L'Huys, and the Portygeese
Ministher and his lady there,
And I recognised, with much surprise,
Our messmate, Bob O'Grady, there.

All these are very good fun—so good in humour and so good in expression, that it would be needless to criticise their peculiar dialect, were it not that Thackeray has made for himself a reputation by his writing of Irish. In this he has been so entirely successful that for many English readers he has established a new language which may not improperly be called Hybernico-Thackerayan. If comedy is to be got from peculiarities of dialect, as no doubt it is, one form will do as well as another, so long as those who read it know better. So it has been with Thackeray's Irish, for in truth he was not familiar with the modes of pronunciation which make up Irish brogue. Therefore, though he is always droll, he is not true to nature. Many an Irishman coming to London, not unnaturally tries to imitate the talk of Londoners. You or I, reader, were we from the West, and were the dear County

* Chair—*i. e.*, Chairman. † *I. e.*, The P. and O Company.

Galway to send either of us to Parliament, would probably endeavour to drop the dear brogue of our country, and in doing so we should make some mistakes. It was these mistakes which Thackeray took for the natural Irish tone. He was amused to hear a major called "Meejor," but was unaware that the sound arose from Pat's affection of English softness of speech. The expression natural to the unadulterated Irishman would rather be "Ma-ajor." He discovers his own provincialism, and trying to be polite and urbane, he says "Meejor." In one of the lines I have quoted there occurs the word "troat." Such a sound never came naturally from the mouth of an Irishman. He puts in an h instead of omitting it, and says "dhrink." He comes to London, and finding out that he is wrong with his "dhrink," he leaves out all the h's he can, and thus comes to "troat." It is this which Thackeray has heard. There is a little piece called the *Last Irish Grievance*, to which Thackeray adds a still later grievance, by the false sounds which he elicits from the calumniated mouth of the pretended Irish poet. Slaves are "sleeves," places are "pleeces," Lord John is "Lard Jahn," fatal is "fetal," danger is "deenger," and native is "neetive." All these are unintended slanders. Tea, Hibernicé, is "tay," please is "plaise," sea is "say," and ease is "aise." The softer sound of e is broadened out by the natural Irishman—not, to my ear, without a certain euphony; but no one in Ireland says or hears the reverse. The Irishman who in London might talk of his "neetive" race, would be mincing his words to please the ear of the cockney.

The Chronicle of the Drum would be a true ballad all through, were it not that there is tacked on to it a long moral in an altered metre. I do not much value the moral, but the ballad is excellent, not only in much of its versification and in the turns of its language, but in the quaint and true picture it gives of the French nation. The drummer, either by himself or by some of his family, has drummed through a century of French battling, caring much for his country and his glory, but understanding nothing of the causes for which he is enthusiastic. Whether for King, Republic, or Emperor, whether fighting and conquering or fighting and conquered, he is happy as long as he can beat his drum on a field of glory. But throughout his adventures there is a touch of chivalry about our drummer. In all the episodes of his country's career he feels much of patriotism and something of tenderness. It is thus he sings during the days of the Revolution:

We had taken the head of King Capet,
  We called for the blood of his wife;
Undaunted she came to the scaffold,
  And bared her fair neck to the knife.
As she felt the foul fingers that touched her,
  She shrank, but she deigned not to speak:
She looked with a royal disdain,
  And died with a blush on her cheek!

'Twas thus that our country was saved!
So told us the Safety Committee!
But, psha, I've the heart of a soldier—
All gentleness, mercy, and pity.
I loathed to assist at such deeds,
And my drum beat its loudest of tunes,
As we offered to justice offended,
The blood of the bloody tribunes.

Away with such foul recollections!
No more of the axe and the block.
I saw the last fight of the sections,
As they fell 'neath our guns at St. Rock.
Young Bonaparte led us that day.

And so it goes on. I will not continue the stanza, because it contains the worst rhyme that Thackeray ever permitted himself to use. *The Chronicle of the Drum* has not the finish which he achieved afterwards, but it is full of national feeling, and carries on its purpose to the end with an admirable persistency:

A curse on those British assassins
Who ordered the slaughter of Ney;
A curse on Sir Hudson who tortured
The life of our hero away.
A curse on all Russians—I hate them;
On all Prussian and Austrian fry;
And, oh, but I pray we may meet them
And fight them again ere I die.

The White Squall—which I can hardly call a ballad, unless any description of a scene in verse may be included in the name—is surely one of the most graphic descriptions ever put into verse. Nothing written by Thackeray shows more plainly his power over words and rhymes. He draws his picture without a line omitted or a line too much, saying with apparent facility all that he has to say, and so saying it that every word conveys its natural meaning.

When a squall, upon a sudden,
Came o'er the waters scudding;
And the clouds began to gather,
And the sea was lashed to lather,
And the lowering thunder grumbled,
And the lightning jumped and tumbled,
And the ship and all the ocean
Woke up in wild commotion.
Then the wind set up a howling,
And the poodle-dog a yowling,
And the cocks began a crowing,
And the old cow raised a lowing,
As she heard the tempest blowing
And fowls and geese did cackle,
And the cordage and the tackle

Began to shriek and crackle;
And the spray dashed o'er the funnels,
And down the deck in runnels;
And the rushing water soaks all,
From the seamen in the fo'ksal
To the stokers whose black faces
Peer out of their bed-places;
And the captain, he was bawling,
And the sailors pulling, hauling,
And the quarter-deck tarpauling
Was shivered in the squalling;
And the passengers awaken,
Most pitifully shaken;
And the steward jumps up and hastens
For the necessary basins.

Then the Greeks they groaned and quivered,
And they knelt, and moaned, and shivered,
As the plunging waters met them,
And splashed and overset them;
And they call in their emergence
Upon countless saints and virgins;
And their marrowbones are bended,
And they think the world is ended.
And the Turkish women for'ard
Were frightened and behorror'rd;
And shrieking and bewildering,
The mothers clutched their children;
The men sang "Allah! Illah!
Mashallah Bis-millah!"
As the warning waters doused them,
And splashed them and soused them;
And they called upon the Prophet,
And thought but little of it.

Then all the fleas in Jewry
Jumped up and bit like fury;
And the progeny of Jacob
Did on the main-deck wake up.
(I wot these greasy Rabbins
Would never pay for cabins);
And each man moaned and jabbered in
His filthy Jewish gaberdine,
In woe and lamentation,
And howling consternation.
And the splashing water drenches
Their dirty brats and wenches;
And they crawl from bales and benches,
In a hundred thousand stenches.
This was the White Squall famous,
Which latterly o'ercame us.

Peg of Limavaddy has always been very popular, and the public have not, I think, been generally aware that the young lady in

question lived in truth at Newton Limavady (with one d). But with the correct name Thackeray would hardly have been so successful with his rhymes.

Citizen or Squire
  Tory, Whig, or Radi-
Cal would all desire
  Peg of Limavaddy.
Had I Homer's fire
  Or that of Sergeant Taddy
Meetly I'd admire
  Peg of Limavaddy.
And till I expire
  Or till I go mad I
Will sing unto my lyre
  Peg of Limavaddy.

The Cane-bottomed Chair is another, better, I think, than *Peg of Limavaddy*, as containing that mixture of burlesque with the pathetic which belonged so peculiarly to Thackeray, and which was indeed the very essence of his genius.

But of all the cheap treasures that garnish my nest,
  There's one that I love and I cherish the best.
For the finest of couches that's padded with hair
  I never would change thee, my cane-bottomed chair.

'Tis a bandy-legged, high-bottomed, worm-eaten seat,
  With a creaking old back and twisted old feet;
But since the fair morning when Fanny sat there,
  I bless thee and love thee, old cane-bottomed chair.

* * * * *

She comes from the past and revisits my room,
  She looks as she then did, all beauty and bloom;
So smiling and tender, so fresh and so fair,
  And yonder she sits in my cane-bottomed chair.

This, in the volume which I have now before me, is followed by a picture of Fanny in the chair, to which I cannot but take exception. I am quite sure that when Fanny graced the room and seated herself in the chair of her old bachelor friend, she had not on a low dress and loosely-flowing drawing-room shawl, nor was there a footstool ready for her feet. I doubt also the headgear. Fanny on that occasion was dressed in her morning apparel, and had walked through the streets, carried no fan, and wore no brooch but one that might be necessary for pinning her shawl.

The Great Cossack Epic is the longest of the ballads. It is a legend of St. Sophia of Kioff, telling how Father Hyacinth, by the aid of St. Sophia, whose wooden statue he carried with him, escaped across the Borysthenes with all the Cossacks at his tail. It is very good fun, but not equal to many of the others. Nor is the

Carmen Lilliense quite to my taste. I should not have declared at once that it had come from Thackeray's hand, had I not known it.

But who could doubt the *Bouillabaisse?* Who else could have written that? Who at the same moment could have been so merry and so melancholy—could have gone so deep into the regrets of life, with words so appropriate to its jollities? I do not know how far my readers will agree with me that to read it always must be a fresh pleasure; but in order that they may agree with me, if they can, I will give it to them entire. If there be one whom it does not please, he will like nothing that Thackeray ever wrote in verse.

THE BALLAD OF BOUILLABAISSE.

A street there is in Paris famous,
For which no rhyme our language yields,
Rue Neuve des Petits Champs its name is—
The New Street of the Little Fields;
And here's an inn, not rich and splendid,
But still in comfortable case;
The which in youth I oft attended,
To eat a bowl of Bouillabaisse.

This Bouillabaise a noble dish is—
A sort of soup, or broth, or brew,
Or hotch-potch of all sorts of fishes,
That Greenwich never could outdo;
Green herbs, red peppers, mussels, saffron,
Soles, onions, garlic, roach, and dace:
All these you eat at Terré's tavern,
In that one dish of Bouillabaisse.

Indeed, a rich and savoury stew 'tis;
And true philosophers, methinks,
Who love all sorts of natural beauties,
Should love good victuals and good drinks.
And Cordelier or Benedictine
Might gladly sure his lot embrace,
Nor find a fast-day too afflicting
Which served him up a Bouillabaisse.

I wonder if the house still there is?
Yes, here the lamp is, as before;
The smiling red-cheeked écaillère is
Still opening oysters at the door.
Is Terré still alive and able?
I recollect his drole grimace;
He'd come and smile before your table,
And hope you liked your Bouillabaisse.

We enter—nothing's changed or older.
"How's Monsieur Terré, waiter, pray?"
The waiter stares and shrugs his shoulder—
"Monsieur is dead this many a day."

"It is the lot of saint and sinner;
So honest Terré's run his race."
"What will Monsieur require for dinner?"
"Say, do you still cook Bouillabaisse!"

"Oh, oui, Monsieur," 's the waiter's answer,
"Quel vin Monsieur desire-t-il?"
"Tell me a good one." "That I can, sir:
The chambertin with yellow seal."
"So Terré's gone," I say, and sink in
My old accustom'd corner-place;
"He's done with feasting and with drinking,
With Burgundy and Bouillabaisse."

My old accustomed corner here is,
The table still is in the nook;
Ah! vanish'd many a busy year is
This well-known chair since last I took.
When first I saw ye cari luoghi,
I'd scarce a beard upon my face,
And now a grizzled, grim old fogy,
I sit and wait for Bouillabaisse.

Where are you, old companions trusty,
Of early days here met to dine?
Come, waiter! quick, a flagon crusty;
I'll pledge them in the good old wine.
The kind old voices and old faces
My memory can quick retrace;
Around the board they take their places,
And share the wine and Bouillabaisse.

There's Jack has made a wondrous marriage;
There's laughing Tom is laughing yet;
There's brave Augustus drives his carriage;
There's poor old Fred in the *Gazette;*
O'er James's head the grass is growing.
Good Lord! the world has wagged apace
Since here we set the claret flowing,
And drank, and ate the Bouillabaisse.

Ah me! how quick the days are flitting!
I mind me of a time that's gone,
When here I'd sit, as now I'm sitting,
In this same place,—but not alone.
A fair young face was nestled near me,
A dear, dear face looked fondly up,
And sweetly spoke and smiled to cheer me!
There's no one now to share my cup.

* * * * *

I drink it as the Fates ordain it.
Come fill it, and have done with rhymes
Fill up the lonely glass, and drain it
In memory of dear old times.

Welcome the wine, whate'er the seal is;
And sit you down and say your grace
With thankful heart, whate'er the meal is.
Here comes the smoking Bouillabaisse.

I am not disposed to say that Thackeray will hold a high place among English poets. He would have been the first to ridicule such an assumption made on his behalf. But I think that his verses will be more popular than those of many highly reputed poets, and that as years roll on they will gain rather than lose in public estimation.

CHAPTER IX.

THACKERAY'S STYLE AND MANNER OF WORK.

A NOVEL in style should be easy, lucid, and of course grammatical. The same may be said of any book; but that which is intended to recreate should be easily understood—for which purpose lucid narration is an essential. In matter it should be moral and amusing. In manner it may be realistic, or sublime, or ludicrous; or it may be all these if the author can combine them. As to Thackeray's performance in style and matter I will say something further on. His manner was mainly realistic, and I will therefore speak first of that mode of expression which was peculiarly his own.

Realism in style has not all the ease which seems to belong to it. It is the object of the author that affects it so to communicate with his reader that all his words shall seem to be natural to the occasion. We do not think the language of Dogberry natural, when he tells neighbour Seacole that "to write and read comes by nature." That is ludicrous. Nor is the language of Hamlet natural when he shows to his mother the portrait of his father:

> See what a grace was seated on this brow;
> Hyperion's curls; the front of Jove himself;
> An eye like Mars, to threaten and command.

That is sublime. Constance is natural when she turns away from the Cardinal, declaring that

> He talks to me that never had a son.

In one respect both the sublime and ludicrous are easier than the realistic. They are not required to be true. A man with an imagination and culture may feign either of them without knowing the ways of men. To be realistic you must know accurately that which you describe. How often do we find in novels that the author makes an attempt at realism and falls into a bathos of absurdity, because he cannot use appropriate language? "No human being ever spoke like that," we say to ourselves—while we should not question the naturalness of the production, either in the grand or the ridiculous.

And yet in very truth the realistic must not be true—but just so far removed from truth as to suit the erroneous idea of truth which the reader may be supposed to entertain. For were a novelist to narrate a conversation between two persons of fair but not high education, and to use the ill-arranged words and fragments of speech which are really common in such conversations, he would seem to have sunk to the ludicrous, and to be attributing to the interlocutors a mode of language much beneath them. Though in fact true it would seem to be far from natural. But, on the other hand, were he to put words grammatically correct in the mouths of his personages, and to round off and to complete the spoken sentences, the ordinary reader would instantly feel such a style to be stilted and unreal. This reader would not analyse it, but would in some dim but sufficiently critical manner be aware that his author was not providing him with a naturally spoken dialogue. To produce the desired effect the narrator must go between the two. He must mount somewhat above the ordinary conversational powers of such persons as are to be represented—lest he disgust. but he must by no means soar into correct phraseology—lest he offend. The realistic—by which we mean that which shall seem to be real—lies between the two, and in reaching it the writer has not only to keep his proper distance on both sides, but has to maintain varying distances in accordance with the position, mode of life, and education of the speakers. Lady Castlewood in *Esmond* would have been properly made to speak with absolute precision; but she goes nearer to the mark than her more ignorant lord, the viscount; less near, however, than her better-educated kinsman, Henry Esmond. He, however, is not made to speak altogether by the card, or he would be unnatural. Nor would each of them speak always in the same strain, but they would alter their language according to their companion—according even to the hour of the day. All this the reader unconsciously perceives, and will not think the language to be natural unless the proper variations be there.

In simple narrative the rule is the same as in dialogue, though it does not admit of the same palpable deviation from correct construction. The story of any incident, to be realistic, will admit neither of sesquipedalian grandeur nor of grotesque images. The one gives an idea of romance and the other of burlesque, to neither of which is truth supposed to appertain. We desire to soar frequently, and then we try romance. We desire to recreate ourselves with the easy and droll. Dulce est desipere in loco. Then we have recourse to burlesque. But in neither do we expect human nature.

I cannot but think that in the hands of the novelist the middle course is the most powerful. Much as we may delight in burlesque, we cannot claim for it the power of achieving great results. So much, I think, will be granted. For the sublime we look rather to poetry than to prose; and though I will give one or two instances just now in which it has been used with great effect in prose fiction,

it does not come home to the heart, teaching a lesson, as does the realistic. The girl who reads is touched by Lucy Ashton, but she feels herself to be convinced of the facts as to Jeanie Deans, and asks herself whether she might not emulate them.

Now as to the realism of Thackeray, I must rather appeal to my readers than attempt to prove it by quotation. Whoever it is that speaks in his pages, does it not seem that such a person would certainly have used such words on such an occasion? If there be need of examination to learn whether it be so or not, let the reader study all that falls from the mouth of Lady Castlewood through the novel called *Esmond*, or all that falls from the mouth of Beatrix. They are persons peculiarly situated—noble women, but who have still lived much out of the world. The former is always conscious of a sorrow; the latter is always striving after an effect—and both on this account are difficult of management. A period for the story has been chosen which is strange and unknown to us, and which has required a peculiar language. One would have said beforehand that whatever might be the charms of the book, it would not be natural. And yet the ear is never wounded by a tone that is false. It is not always the case that in novel reading the ear should be wounded because the words spoken are unnatural. Bulwer does not wound, though he never puts into the mouth of any of his persons words such as would have been spoken. They are not expected from him. It is something else that he provides. From Thackeray they are expected—and from many others. But Thackeray never disappoints. Whether it be a great duke, such as he who was to have married Beatrix, or a mean chaplain, such as Tusher, or Captain Steele the humorist, they talk—not as they would have talked probably, of which I am no judge—but as we feel that they might have talked. We find ourselves willing to take it as proved because it is there, which is the strongest possible evidence of the realistic capacity of the writer.

As to the sublime in novels, it is not to be supposed that any very high rank of sublimity is required to put such works within the pale of that definition. I allude to those in which an attempt is made to soar above the ordinary actions and ordinary language of life. We may take as an instance *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. That is intended to be sublime throughout. Even the writer never for a moment thought of descending to real life. She must have been untrue to her own idea of her own business had she done so. It is all stilted—all at a certain altitude among the clouds. It has been in its time a popular book, and has had its world of readers. Those readers no doubt preferred the diluted romance of Mrs. Radcliff to the condensed realism of Fielding. At any rate, they did not look for realism. *Pelham* may be taken as another instance of the sublime, though there is so much in it that is of the world worldly, though an intentional fall to the ludicrous is often made in it. The personages talk in glittering dialogues, throwing about philosophy, science, and the classics, in a manner which is always suggestive and often amusing. The book is brilliant with intellect.

But no word is ever spoken as it would have been spoken—no detail is ever narrated as it would have occurred. Bulwer no doubt regarded novels as romantic, and would have looked with contempt on any junction of realism and romance, though, in varying his work, he did not think it beneath him to vary his sublimity with the ludicrous. The sublime in novels is no doubt most effective when it breaks out, as though by some burst of nature, in the midst of a story true to life. "If," said Evan Maccombich, "the Saxon gentlemen are laughing because a poor man such as me thinks my life, or the life of six of my degree, is worth that of Vich Ian Vohr, it's like enough they may be very right; but if they laugh because they think I would not keep my word and come back to redeem him, I can tell them they ken neither the heart of a Hielandman nor the honour of a gentleman." That is sublime. And, again, when Balfour of Burley slaughters Bothwell, the death scene is sublime. "Die, bloodthirsty dog!" said Burley. "Die as thou hast lived! Die like the beasts that perish—hoping nothing, believing nothing!"—"And fearing nothing," said Bothwell. Horrible as is the picture, it is sublime. As is also that speech of Meg Merrilies, as she addresses Mr. Bertram, standing on the bank. "Ride your ways," said the gipsy; "ride your ways, Laird of Ellangowan; ride your ways, Godfrey Bertram. This day have ye quenched seven smoking hearths; see if the fire in your ain parlour burn the blyther for that. Ye have riven the thack off seven cottar houses; look if your ain roof-tree stand the faster. Ye may stable your stirks in the shealings at Derncleugh; see that the hare does not couch on the hearthstane at Ellangowan." That is romance, and reaches the very height of the sublime. That does not offend, impossible though it be that any old woman should have spoken such words, because it does in truth lift the reader up among the bright stars. It is thus that the sublime may be mingled with the realistic, if the writer has the power. Thackeray also rises in that way to a high pitch, though not in many instances. Romance does not often justify to him an absence of truth. The scene between Lady Castlewood and the Duke of Hamilton is one when she explains to her child's suitor who Henry Esmond is. "My daughter may receive presents from the head of our house," says the lady, speaking up for her kinsman. "My daughter may thankfully take kindness from her father's, her mother's, her brother's dearest friend." The whole scene is of the same nature, and is evidence of Thackeray's capacity for the sublime. And again, when the same lady welcomes the same kinsman on his return from the wars, she rises as high. But as I have already quoted a part of the passage in the chapter on this novel I will not repeat it here.

It may perhaps be said of the sublime in novels—which I have endeavoured to describe as not being generally of a high order—that it is apt to become cold, stilted, and unsatisfactory. What may be done by impossible castles among impossible mountains, peopled by impossible heroes and heroines, and fraught with im-

possible horrors, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* have shown us. But they require a patient reader, and one who can content himself with a long protracted and most unemotional excitement. The sublimity which is effected by sparkling speeches is better, if the speeches really have something in them beneath the sparkles. Those of Bulwer generally have. Those of his imitators are often without anything, the sparkles even hardly sparkling. At the best they fatigue; and a novel, if it fatigues, is unpardonable. Its only excuse is to be found in the amusement it affords. It should instruct also, no doubt, but it never will do so unless it hides its instruction and amuses. Scott understood all this, when he allowed himself only such sudden bursts as I have described. Even in *The Bride of Lammermoor*, which I do not regard as among the best of his performances, as he soars high into the sublime, so does he descend low into the ludicrous.

In this latter division of pure fiction—the burlesque, as it is commonly called, or the ludicrous—Thackeray is quite as much at home as in the realistic, though, the vehicle being less powerful, he has achieved smaller results by it. Manifest as are the objects in his view when he wrote *The Hoggarty Diamond* or *The Legend of the Rhine*, they were less important and less evidently effected than those attempted by *Vanity Fair* and *Pendennis*. Captain Shindy, the Snob, does not tell us so plainly what is not a gentleman as does Colonel Newcome what is. Nevertheless, the ludicrous has, with Thackeray, been very powerful and very delightful.

In trying to describe what is done by literature of this class, it is especially necessary to remember that different readers are affected in a different way. That which is one man's meat is another man's poison. In the sublime, when the really grand has been reached, it is the reader's own fault if he be not touched. We know that many are indifferent to the soliloquies of Hamlet, but we do not hesitate to declare to ourselves that they are so because they lack the power of appreciating grand language. We do not scruple to attribute to those who are indifferent some inferiority of intelligence. And in regard to the realistic, when the truth of a well-told story or life-like character does not come home, we think that then, too, there is deficiency in the critical ability. But there is nothing necessarily lacking to a man because he does not enjoy *The Heathen Chinee* or *The Biglow Papers;* and the man to whom these delights of American humour are leather and prunello may be of all the most enraptured by the wit of Sam Weller or the mock piety of Pecksniff. It is a matter of taste and not of intellect, as one man likes caviare after his dinner, while another prefers apple-pie; and the man himself cannot, or, as far as we can see, does not, direct his own taste in the one matter more than in the other.

Therefore I cannot ask others to share with me the delight which I have in the various and peculiar expressions of the ludicrous which are common to Thackeray. Some considerable portion of it consists in bad spelling. We may say that Charles James Harrington Fitzroy Yellowplush, or C. FitzJeames De La Pluche,

as he is afterwards called, would be nothing but for his "orthography so carefully inaccuwate." As I have before said, Mrs. Malaprop had seemed to have reached the height of this humour, and in having done so to have made any repetition unpalatable. But Thackeray's studied blundering is altogether different from that of Sheridan. Mrs. Malaprop uses her words in a delightfully wrong sense. Yellowplush would be a very intelligible, if not quite an accurate writer, had he not made for himself special forms of English words altogether new to the eye.

"My ma wrapped up my buth in a mistry. I may be illygitmit; I may have been changed at nus; but I've always had gen'l'm'nly tastes through life, and have no doubt that I come of a gen'l'm'nly origum." We cannot admit that there is wit, or even humour, in bad spelling alone. Were it not that Yellowplush, with his bad spelling, had so much to say for himself, there would be nothing in it; but there is always a sting of satire directed against some real vice, or some growing vulgarity, which is made sharper by the absurdity of the language. In *The Diary of George IV.* there are the following reflections on a certain correspondence:—"Wooden you phansy, now, that the author of such a letter, instead of writun about pipple of tip-top quality, was describin' Vinegar Yard? Would you beleave that the lady he was a-ritin' to was a chased modist lady of honour and mother of a family? *O trumpery! o morris!* as Homer says. This is a higeous pictur of manners, such as I weap to think of, as every morl man must weap." We do not wonder that when he makes his "ajew" he should have been called up to be congratulated on the score of his literary performances by his master, before the Duke, and Lord Bagwig, and Dr. Larner, and "Sawedwadgeorgeearllittnbulwig." All that Yellowplush says or writes are among the pearls which Thackeray was continually scattering abroad.

But this of the distinguished footman was only one of the forms of the ludicrous which he was accustomed to use in the furtherance of some purpose which he had at heart. It was his practice to clothe things most revolting with an assumed grace and dignity, and to add to the weight of his condemnation by the astounding mendacity of the parody thus drawn. There was a grim humour in this which has been displeasing to some, as seeming to hold out to vice a hand which has appeared for too long a time to be friendly. As we are disposed to be not altogether sympathetic with a detective policeman who shall have spent a jolly night with a delinquent, for the sake of tracing home the suspected guilt to his late comrade, so are some disposed to be almost angry with our author, who seems to be too much at home with his rascals, and to live with them on familiar terms till we doubt whether he does not forget their rascality. *Barry Lyndon* is the strongest example we have of this style of the ludicrous, and the critics of whom I speak have thought that our friendly relations with Barry have been too genial, too apparently genuine, so that it might almost be doubtful whether during the narrative we might not, at this or the other crisis, be rather

with him than against him. "After all," the reader might say, on coming to that passage in which Barry defends his trade as a gambler—a passage which I have quoted in speaking of the novel—"after all, this man is more hero than scoundrel;" so well is the burlesque humour maintained, so well does the scoundrel hide his own villany. I can easily understand that to some it should seem too long drawn out. To me it seems to be the perfection of humour—and of philosophy. If such a one us Barry Lyndon, a man full of intellect, can be made thus to love and cherish his vice, and to believe in its beauty, how much more necessary is it to avoid the footsteps which lead to it? But, as I have said above, there is no standard by which to judge of the excellence of the ludicrous as there is of the sublime, and even the realistic.

No writer ever had a stronger proclivity towards parody than Thackeray; and we may, I think, confess that there is no form of literary drollery more dangerous. The parody will often mar the gem of which it coarsely reproduces the outward semblance. The word "damaged," used instead of "damask," has destroyed to my ear for ever the music of one of the sweetest passages in Shakespeare. But it must be acknowledged of Thackeray that, fond as he is of this branch of humour, he has done little or no injury by his parodies. They run over with fun, but are so contrived that they do not lessen the flavour of the original. I have given in one of the preceding chapters a little set of verses of his own called *The Willow Tree*, and his own parody on his own work. There the reader may see how effective a parody may be in destroying the sentiment of the piece parodied. But in dealing with other authors he has been grotesque without being severely critical, and has been very like, without making ugly or distasteful that which he has imitated. No one who has admired *Coningsby* will admire it the less because of *Codlingsby*. Nor will the undoubted romance of *Eugene Aram* be lessened in the estimation of any reader of novels by the well-told career of *George de Barnwell*. One may say that to laugh *Ivanhoe* out of face, or to lessen the glory of that immortal story, would be beyond the power of any farcical effect. Thackeray, in his *Rowena and Rebecca*, certainly had no such purpose. Nothing of *Ivanhoe* is injured, nothing made less valuable than it was before, yet, of all prose parodies in the language, it is perhaps the most perfect. Every character is maintained, every incident has a taste of Scott. It has the twang of *Ivanhoe* from beginning to end, and yet there is not a word in it by which the author of *Ivanhoe* could have been offended. But then there is the purpose beyond that of the mere parody. Prudish women have to be laughed at, and despotic kings, and parasite lords and bishops. The ludicrous alone is but poor fun; but when the ludicrous has a meaning, it can be very effective in the hands of such a master as this.

> "He to die!" resumed the bishop. "He a mortal like to us!
> Death was not for him intended, though *communis omnibus*.
> Keeper, you are irreligious, for to talk and cavil thus!"

So much I have said of the manner in which Thackeray did his work, endeavouring to represent human nature as he saw it, so that his readers should learn to love what is good, and to hate what is evil. As to the merits of his style, it will be necessary to insist on them the less, because it has been generally admitted to be easy, lucid, and grammatical. I call that style easy by which the writer has succeeded in conveying to the reader that which the reader is intended to receive with the least possible amount of trouble to him. I call that style lucid which conveys to the reader most accurately all that the writer wishes to convey on any subject. The two virtues will, I think, be seen to be very different. An author may wish to give an idea that a certain flavour is bitter. He shall leave a conviction that it is simply disagreeable. Then he is not lucid. But he shall convey so much as that, in such a manner as to give the reader no trouble in arriving at the conclusion. Therefore he is easy. The subject here suggested is as little complicated as possible; but in the intercourse which is going on continually between writers and readers, affairs of all degrees of complication are continually being discussed, of a nature so complicated that he inexperienced writer is puzzled at every turn to express himself, and the altogether inartistic writer fails to do so. Who among writers has not to acknowledge that he is often unable to tell all that he has to tell? Words refuse to do it for him. He struggles and stumbles and alters and adds, but finds at last that he has gone either too far or not quite far enough. Then there comes upon him the necessity of choosing between two evils. He must either give up the fulness of his thought, and content himself with presenting some fragment of it in that lucid arrangement of words which he affects; or he must bring out his thought with ambages; he must mass his sentences inconsequentially; he must struggle up hill almost hopelessly with his phrases—so that at the end the reader will have to labour as he himself has laboured, or else to leave behind much of the fruit which it has been intended that he should garner. It is the ill-fortune of some to be neither easy or lucid; and there is nothing more wonderful in the history of letters than the patience of readers when called upon to suffer under the double calamity. It is as though a man were reading a dialogue of Plato, understanding neither the subject nor the language. But it is often the case that one has to be sacrificed to the other. The pregnant writer will sometimes solace himself by declaring that it is not his business to supply intelligence to the reader; and then, in throwing out the entirety of his thought, will not stop to remember that he cannot hope to scatter his ideas far and wide unless he can make them easily intelligible. Then the writer who is determined that his book shall not be put down because it is troublesome, is too apt to avoid the knotty bits and shirk the rocky turns, because he cannot with ease to himself make them easy to others. If this be acknowledged, I shall be held to be right in saying not only that ease and lucidity in style are different virtues, but that they are often opposed to each other. They may, however, be

combined, and then the writer will have really learned the art of writing. Omne tulit punctum qui miscuit utile dulci. It is to be done, I believe, in all languages. A man by art and practice shall at least obtain such a masterhood over words as to express all that he thinks, in phrases that shall be easily understood.

In such a small space as can here be allowed, I cannot give instances to prove that this has been achieved by Thackeray. Nor would instances prove the existence of the virtue, though instances might the absence. The proof lies in the work of the man's life, and can only become plain to those who have read his writings. I must refer readers to their own experiences, and ask them whether they have found themselves compelled to study passages in Thackeray in order that they might find a recondite meaning, or whether they have not been sure that they and the author have together understood all that there was to understand in the matter. Have they run backward over the passages, and then gone on not quite sure what the author meant? If not, then he has been easy and lucid. We have not had it so easy with all modern writers, nor with all that are old. I may best, perhaps, explain my meaning by taking something written long ago; something very valuable, in order that I may not damage my argument by comparing the easiness of Thackeray with the harshness of some author who has in other respects failed of obtaining approbation. If you take the play of *Cymbeline*, you will, I think, find it to be anything but easy reading. Nor is Shakespeare always lucid. For purposes of his own he will sometimes force his readers to doubt his meaning, even after prolonged study. It has ever been so with *Hamlet*. My readers will not, I think, be so crossgrained with me as to suppose that I am putting Thackeray as a master of style above Shakespeare. I am only endeavouring to explain by reference to the great master the condition of literary production which he attained. Whatever Thackeray says, the reader cannot fail to understand; and whatever Thackeray attempts to communicate, he succeeds in conveying.

That he is grammatical I must leave to my readers' judgment, with a simple assertion in his favour. There are some who say that grammar—by which I mean accuracy of composition, in accordance with certain acknowledged rules—is only a means to an end; and that if a writer can absolutely achieve the end by some other mode of his own, he need not regard the prescribed means. If a man can so write as to be easily understood, and to convey lucidly that which he has to convey without accuracy of grammar, why should he subject himself to unnecessary trammels? Why not make a path for himself, if the path so made will certainly lead him whither he wishes to go? The answer is, that no other path will lead others whither he wishes to carry them but that which is common to him and to those others. It is necessary that there should be a ground equally familiar to the writer and to his readers. If there be no such common ground, they will not come into full accord. There have been recusants who, by a certain acuteness of their own, have partly done so—wilful recusants; but

they have been recusants, not to the extent of discarding grammar—which no writer could do and not be altogether in the dark—but so far as to have created for themselves a phraseology which has been picturesque by reason of its illicit vagaries; as a woman will sometimes please ill-instructed eyes and ears by little departures from feminine propriety. They have probably laboured in their vocation as sedulously as though they had striven to be correct, and have achieved at the best but a short-lived success—as is the case also with the unconventional female. The charm of the disorderly soon loses itself in the ugliness of disorder. And there are others rebellious from grammar, who are, however, hardly to be called rebels, because the laws which they break have never been altogether known to them. Among those very dear to me in English literature, one or two might be named of either sort, whose works, though they have that in them which will insure to them a long life, will become from year to year less valuable and less venerable, because their authors have either scorned or have not known that common ground of language on which the author and his readers should stand together. My purport here is only with Thackeray, and I say that he stands always on that common ground. He quarrels with none of the laws. As the lady who is most attentive to conventional propriety may still have her own fashion of dress and her own mode of speech, so had Thackeray very manifestly his own style; but it is one the correctness of which has never been impugned.

I hold that gentleman to be the best dressed whose dress no one observes. I am not sure but that the same may be said of an author's written language. Only, where shall we find an example of such perfection? Always easy, always lucid, always correct, we may find them; but who is the writer, easy, lucid, and correct, who has not impregnated his writing with something of that personal flavour which we call mannerism? To speak of authors well known to all readers—Does not *The Rambler* taste of Johnson; *The Decline and Fall*, of Gibbon; *The Middle Ages*, of Hallam; *The History of England*, of Macaulay; and *The Invasion of the Crimea*, of Kinglake? Do we not know the elephantine tread of *The Saturday*, and the precise tone of *The Spectator?* I have sometimes thought that Swift has been nearest to the mark of any—writing English and not writing Swift. But I doubt whether an accurate observer would not trace even here the "mark of the beast." Thackeray, too, has a strong flavour of Thackeray. I am inclined to think that his most besetting sin in style—the little ear-mark by which he is most conspicuous—is a certain affected familiarity. He indulges too frequently in little confidences with individual readers, in which pretended allusions to himself are frequent. "What would you do? what would you say now, if you were in such a position?" he asks. He describes this practice of his in the preface to *Pendennis*. "It is a sort of confidential talk between writer and reader. . . . In the course of his volubility the perpetual speaker must of necessity lay bare his own weaknesses, vanities, peculiarities." In

the short contributions to periodicals on which he tried his 'prentice hand, such addresses and conversations were natural and efficacious; but in a larger work of fiction they cause an absence of that dignity to which even a novel may aspire. You feel that each morsel as you read it is a detached bit, and that it has all been written in detachments. The book is robbed of its integrity by a certain good-humoured geniality of language, which causes the reader to be almost too much at home with his author. There is a saying that familiarity breeds contempt, and I have been sometimes inclined to think that our author has sometimes failed to stand up for himself with sufficiency of "personal deportment."

In other respects Thackeray's style is excellent. As I have said before, the reader always understands his words without an effort, and receives all that the author has to give.

There now remains to be discussed the matter of our author's work. The manner and the style are but the natural wrappings in which the goods have been prepared for the market. Of these goods it is no doubt true that unless the wrappings be in some degree meritorious the article will not be accepted at all; but it is the kernel which we seek, which, if it be not of itself sweet and digestible, cannot be made serviceable by any shell, however pretty or easy to be cracked. I have said previously that it is the business of a novel to instruct in morals and to amuse. I will go further, and will add, having been for many years a most prolific writer of novels myself, that I regard him who can put himself into close communication with young people year after year without making some attempt to do them good as a very sorry fellow indeed. However poor your matter may be, however near you may come to that "foolishest of existing mortals," as Carlyle presumes some unfortunate novelist to be, still, if there be those who read your works, they will undoubtedly be more or less influenced by what they find there. And it is because the novelist amuses that he is thus influential. The sermon too often has no such effect, because it is applied with the declared intention of having it. The palpable and overt dose the child rejects; but that which is cunningly insinuated by the aid of jam or honey is accepted unconsciously, and goes on upon its curative mission. So it is with the novel. It is taken because of its jam and honey. But, unlike the honest simple jam and honey of the household cupboard, it is never unmixed with physic. There will be the dose within it, either curative or poisonous. The girl will be taught modesty or immodesty, truth or falsehood; the lad will be taught honour or dishonour, simplicity or affectation. Without the lesson the amusement will not be there. There are novels which certainly can teach nothing; but then neither can they amuse any one.

I should be said to insist absurdly on the power of my own confraternity if I were to declare that the bulk of the young people in the upper and middle classes receive their moral teaching chiefly from the novels they read. Mothers would no doubt think of their own sweet teaching; fathers of the examples which they set; and

schoolmasters of the excellence of their instructions. Happy is the country that has such mothers, fathers, and schoolmasters! But the novelist creeps in closer than the schoolmaster, closer than the father, closer almost than the mother. He is the chosen guide, the tutor whom the young pupil chooses for herself. She retires with him, suspecting no lesson, safe against rebuke, throwing herself head and heart into the narration as she can hardly do into her task-work; and there she is taught—how she shall learn to love; how she shall receive the lover when he comes; how far she should advance to meet the joy; why she should be reticent, and not throw herself at once into this new delight. It is the same with the young man, though he would be more prone even than she to reject the suspicion of such tutorship. But he too will there learn either to speak the truth, or to lie; and will receive from his novel lessons either of real manliness, or of that affected apishness and tailor-begotten demeanour which too many professors of the craft give out as their dearest precepts.

At any rate the close intercourse is admitted. Where is the house now from which novels are tabooed? Is it not common to allow them almost indiscriminately, so that young and old each chooses his own novel? Shall he, then, to whom this close fellowship is allowed—this inner confidence—shall he not be careful what words he uses, and what thoughts he expresses, when he sits in council with his young friend? This, which it will certainly be his duty to consider with so much care, will be the matter of his work. We know what was thought of such matter when Lydia in the play was driven to the necessity of flinging "*Peregrine Pickle* under the toilet," and thrusting "*Lord Aimwell* under the sofa." We have got beyond that now, and are tolerably sure that our girls do not hide their novels. The more freely they are allowed, the more necessary is it that he who supplies shall take care that they are worthy of the trust that is given to them.

Now let the reader ask himself what are the lessons which Thackeray has taught. Let him send his memory running back over all those characters of whom we have just been speaking, and ask himself whether any girl has been taught to be immodest, or any man unmanly, by what Thackeray has written. A novelist has two modes of teaching—by good example or bad. It is not to be supposed that because the person treated of be evil, therefore the precept will be evil. If so, some personages with whom we have been made well acquainted from our youth upwards would have been omitted in our early lessons. It may be a question whether the teaching is not more efficacious which comes from the evil example. What story was ever more powerful in showing the beauty of feminine reticence, and the horrors of feminine evil-doing, than the fate of Effie Deans? The Templar would have betrayed a woman to his lust, but has not encouraged others by the freedom of his life. Varney was utterly bad—but though a gay courtier, he has enticed no others to go the way that he went. So it has been with Thackeray. His examples have been generally of that kind

—but they have all been efficacious in their teaching on the side of modesty and manliness, truth and simplicity. When some girl shall have traced from first to last the character of Beatrix, what, let us ask, will be the result on her mind? Beatrix was born noble, clever, beautiful, with certain material advantages, which it was within her compass to improve by her nobility, wit, and beauty. She was quite alive to that fact, and thought of those material advantages, to the utter exclusion, in our mind, of any idea of moral goodness. She realised it all, and told herself that that was the game she would play. "Twenty-five!" says she; "and in eight years no man has ever touched my heart!" That is her boast when she is about to be married—her only boast of herself. "A most detestable young woman!" some will say. "An awful example!" others will add. Not a doubt of it. She proves the misery of her own career so fully that no one will follow it. The example is so awful that it will surely deter. The girl will declare to herself that not in that way will she look for the happiness which she hopes to enjoy; and the young man will say, as he reads it, that no Beatrix shall touch his heart.

You may go through all his characters with the same effect. Pendennis will be scorned because he is light; Warrington loved because he is strong and merciful; Dobbin will be honoured because he is unselfish; and the old colonel, though he be foolish, vain, and weak, almost worshipped because he is so true a gentleman. It is in the handling of questions such as these that we have to look for the matter of the novelist—those moral lessons which he mixes up with his jam and his honey. I say that with Thackeray the physic is always curative and never poisonous. He may be admitted safely into that close fellowship, and be allowed to accompany the dear ones to their retreats. The girl will never become bold under his preaching, or taught to throw herself at men's heads. Nor will the lad receive a false flashy idea of what becomes a youth, when he is first about to take his place among men.

As to that other question, whether Thackeray be amusing as well as salutary, I must leave it to public opinion. There is now being brought out of his works a more splendid edition than has ever been produced in any age or any country of the writings of such an author. A certain fixed number of copies only is being issued, and each copy will cost £33 12*s.* when completed. It is understood that a very large proportion of the edition has been already bought or ordered. Cost, it will be said, is a bad test of excellence. It will not prove the merit of a book any more than it will of a horse. But it is proof of the popularity of the book. Print and illustrate and bind up some novels how you will, no one will buy them. Previous to these costly volumes, there have been two entire editions of his works since the author's death, one comparatively cheap and the other dear. Before his death his stories had been scattered in all imaginable forms. I may therefore assert that their charm has been proved by their popularity.

There remains for us only this question—whether the nature of

Thackeray's works entitle him to be called a cynic. The word is one which is always used in a bad sense. "Of a dog; currish," is the definition which we get from Johnson—quite correctly, and in accordance with its etymology. And he gives us examples. "How vilely does this cynic rhyme," he takes from Shakespeare; and Addison speaks of a man degenerating into a cynic. That Thackeray's nature was soft and kindly—gentle almost to a fault—has been shown elsewhere. But they who had called him a cynic have spoken of him merely as a writer—and as writer he has certainly taken upon himself the special task of barking at the vices and follies of the world around him. Any satirist might in the same way be called a cynic in so far as his satire goes. Swift was a cynic, certainly. Pope was cynical when he was a satirist. Juvena was all cynical, because he was all satirist. If that be what is meant, Thackeray was certainly a cynic. But that is not all that the word implies. It intends to go back beyond the work of the man, and to describe his heart. It says of any satirist so described that he has given himself up to satire, not because things have been evil, but because he himself has been evil. Hamlet is a satirist, whereas Thersites is a cynic. If Thackeray be judged after this fashion, the word is as inappropriate to the writer as to the man.

But it has to be confessed that Thackeray did allow his intellect to be too thoroughly saturated with the aspect of the ill side of things. We can trace the operation of his mind from his earliest days, when he commenced his parodies at school; when he brought out *The Snob* at Cambridge, when he sent *Yellowplush* out upon the world as a satirist on the doings of gentlemen generally; when he wrote his *Catherine*, to show the vileness of the taste for what he would have called Newgate literature; and *The Hoggarty Diamond*, to attack bubble companies; and *Barry Lyndon*, to expose the pride which a rascal may take in his rescality. Becky Sharp, Major Pendennis, Beatrix, both as a young and as an old woman, were written with the same purpose. There is a touch of satire in every drawing that he made. A jeer is needed for something that is ridiculous, scorn has to be thrown on something that is vile. The same feeling is to be found in every line of every ballad.

VANITAS VANITATUM.

Methinks the text is never stale,
  And life is every day renewing
Fresh comments on the old old tale,
  Of Folly, Fortune, Glory, Ruin.

Hark to the preacher, preaching still!
  He lifts his voice and cries his sermon,
Here at St. Peter's of Cornhill,
  As yonder on the Mount of Hermon—

For you and me to heart to take
  (O dear beloved brother readers),
To-day—as when the good king spake
  Beneath the solemn Syrian cedars.

It was just so with him always. He was "crying his sermon," hoping, if it might be so, to do something towards lessening the evils he saw around him. We all preach our sermon, but not always with the same earnestness. He had become so urgent in the cause, so loud in his denunciations, that he did not stop often to speak of the good things around him. Now and again he paused and blessed amid the torrent of his anathemas. There are Dobbin, and Esmond and Colonel Newcome. But his anathemas are the loudest. It has been so, I think, nearly always with the eloquent preachers.

I will insert here—especially here at the end of this chapter, in which I have spoken of Thackeray's matter and manner of writing, because of the justice of the criticism conveyed—the lines which Lord Houghton wrote on his death, and which are to be found in the February number of *The Cornhill* of 1864. It was the first number printed after his death. I would add that, though no Dean applied for permission to bury Thackeray in Westminster Abbey, his bust was placed there without delay. What is needed by the nation in such a case is simply a lasting memorial there, where such memorials are most often seen and most highly honoured. But we can all of us sympathise with the feeling of the poet, writing immediately on the loss of such a friend:

When one, whose nervous English verse
  Public and party hates defied,
Who bore and bandied many a curse
  Of angry times—when Dryden died,

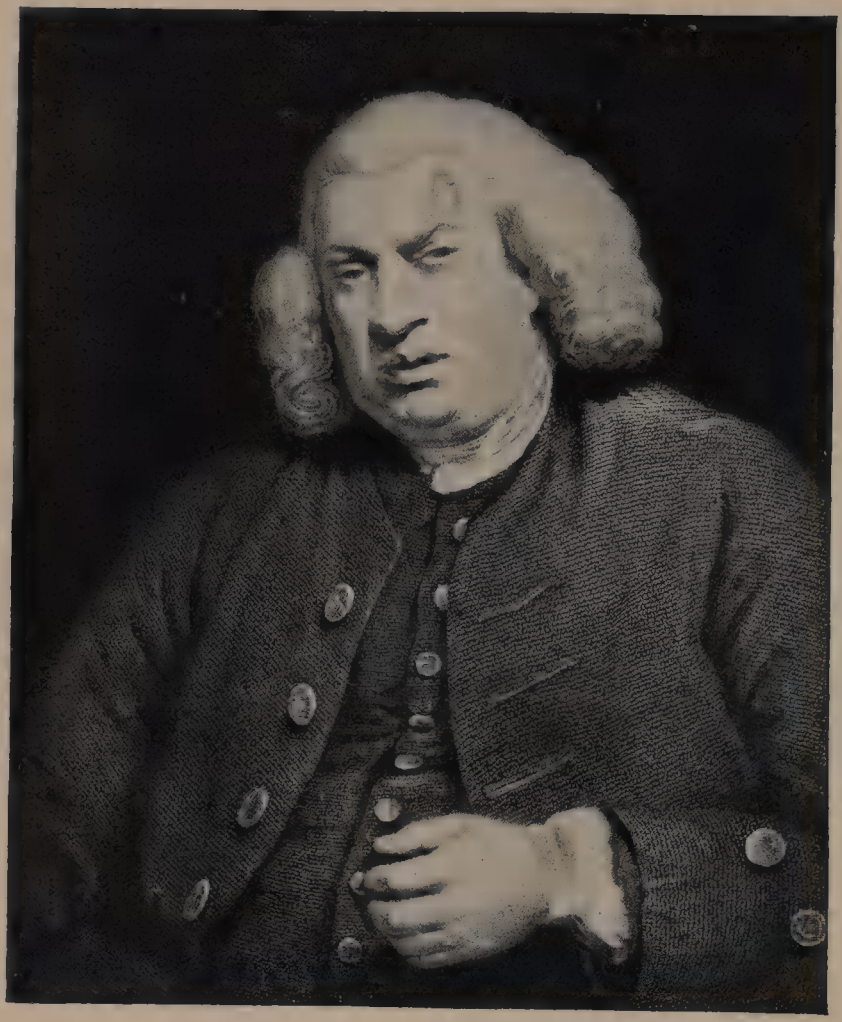
Our royal abbey's Bishop-Dean
  Waited for no suggestive prayer,
But, ere one day closed o'er the scene,
  Craved, as a boon, to lay him there.

The wayward faith, the faulty life,
  Vanished before a nation's pain.
Panther and Hind forgot their strife,
  And rival statesmen thronged the fane.

O gentle censor of our age!
  Prime master of our ampler tongue!
Whose word of wit and generous page
  Were never wrath, except with wrong,—

Fielding—without the manner's dross,
  Scott—with a spirit's larger room,
What Prelate deems thy grave his loss?
  What Halifax erects thy tomb?

But, may be, he—who so could draw
  The hidden great—the humble wise,
Yielding with them to God's good law,
  Makes the Pantheon where he lies.



JOHNSON

From the Painting by Sir Joshua Reynolds in the Collection of Sir Robert Peel, Bart.

SAMUEL JOHNSON

BY

LESLIE STEPHEN

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SAMUEL JOHNSON.

CHAPTER I.

CHILDHOOD AND EARLY LIFE.

SAMUEL JOHNSON was born in Lichfield in 1709. His father, Michael Johnson, was a bookseller, highly respected by the cathedral clergy, and for a time sufficiently prosperous to be a magistrate of the town, and, in the year of his son's birth, sheriff of the county. He opened a bookstall on market-days at neighbouring towns, including Birmingham, which was as yet unable to maintain a separate bookseller. The tradesman often exaggerates the prejudices of the class whose wants he supplies, and Michael Johnson was probably a more devoted High Churchman and Tory than many of the cathedral clergy themselves. He reconciled himself with difficulty to taking the oaths against the exiled dynasty. He was a man of considerable mental and physical power, but tormented by hypochondriacal tendencies. His son inherited a share both of his constitution and of his principles. Long afterwards Samuel associated with his childish days a faint but solemn recollection of a lady in diamonds and long black hood. The lady was Queen Anne, to whom, in compliance with superstition just dying a natural death, he had been taken by his mother to be touched for the king's evil. The touch was ineffectual. Perhaps, as Boswell suggested, he ought to have been presented to the genuine heirs of the Stuarts in Rome. Disease and superstition had thus stood by his cradle, and they never quitted him during life. The demon of hypochondria was always lying in wait for him, and could be exorcised for a time only by hard work or social excitement. Of this we shall hear enough; but it may be as well to sum up at once some of the physical characteristics which marked him through life and greatly influenced his career.

The disease had scarred and disfigured features otherwise regular and always impressive. It had seriously injured his eyes, entirely destroying, it seems, the sight of one. He could not, it is said, distinguish a friend's face half a yard off, and pictures were to him meaningless patches, in which he could never see the resemblance to their objects. The statement is perhaps exaggerated;

for he could see enough to condemn a portrait of himself. He expressed some annoyance when Reynolds had painted him with a pen held close to his eye; and protested that he would not be handed down to posterity as "blinking Sam." It seems that habits of minute attention atoned in some degree for this natural defect. Boswell tells us how Johnson once corrected him as to the precise shape of a mountain; and Mrs. Thrale says that he was a close and exacting critic of ladies' dress, even to the accidental position of a riband. He could even lay down æsthetical canons upon such matters. He reproved her for wearing a dark dress as unsuitable to a "little creature." "What," he asked, "have not all insects gay colours?" His insensibility to music was even more pronounced than his dulness of sight. On hearing it said, in praise of a musical performance, that it was in any case difficult, his feeling comment was, "I wish it had been impossible!"

The queer convulsions by which he amazed all beholders were probably connected with his disease, though he and Reynolds ascribed them simply to habit. When entering a doorway with his blind companion, Miss Williams, he would suddenly desert her on the step in order to "whirl and twist about" in strange gesticulations. The performance partook of the nature of a superstitious ceremonial. He would stop in a street or the middle of a room to go through it correctly. Once he collected a laughing mob in Twickenham meadows by his antics; his hands imitating the motions of a jockey riding at full speed and his feet twisting in and out to make heels and toes touch alternately. He presently sat down and took out a *Grotius De Veritate*, over which he "see sawed" so violently that the mob ran back to see what was the matter. Once in such a fit he suddenly twisted off the shoe of a lady who sat by him. Sometimes he seemed to be obeying some hidden impulse, which commanded him to touch every post in a street or tread on the centre of every paving-stone, and would return if his task had not been accurately performed.

In spite of such oddities, he was not only possessed of physical power corresponding to his great height and massive stature, but was something of a proficient at athletic exercises. He was conversant with the theory, at least, of boxing; a knowledge probably acquired from an uncle who kept the ring at Smithfield for a year, and was never beaten in boxing or wrestling. His constitutional fearlessness would have made him a formidable antagonist. Hawkins describes the oak staff, six feet in length and increasing from one to three inches in diameter, which lay ready to his hand when he expected an attack from Macpherson of Ossian celebrity. Once he is said to have taken up a chair at the theatre upon which a man had seated himself during his temporary absence, and to have tossed it and its occupant bodily into the pit. He would swim into pools said to be dangerous, beat huge dogs into peace, climb trees, and even run races and jump gates. Once at least he went out foxhunting, and though he despised the amusement, was deeply touched by the complimentary assertion that he rode as well

as the most illiterate fellow in England. Perhaps the most whimsical of his performances was when, in his fifty-fifth year, he went to the top of a high hill with his friend Langton. "I have not had a roll for a long time," said the great lexicographer suddenly, and, after deliberately emptying his pockets, he laid himself parallel to the edge of the hill, and descended, turning over and over till he came to the bottom. We may believe, as Mrs. Thrale remarks upon his jumping over a stool to show that he was not tired by his hunting, that his performances in this kind were so strange and uncouth that a fear for the safety of his bones quenched the spectator's tendency to laugh.

In such a strange case was imprisoned one of the most vigorous intellects of the time. Vast strength hampered by clumsiness and associated with grievous disease, deep and massive powers of feeling limited by narrow though acute perceptions, were characteristic both of soul and body. These peculiarities were manifested from his early infancy. Miss Seward, a typical specimen of the provincial *précieuse*, attempted to trace them in an epitaph which he was said to have written at the age of three.

> Here lies good master duck
> Whom Samuel Johnson trod on;
> If it had lived, it had been good luck,
> For then we had had an odd one.

The verses, however, were really made by his father, who passed them off as the child's, and illustrate nothing but the paternal vanity. In fact the boy was regarded as something of an infant prodigy. His great powers of memory, characteristic of a mind singularly retentive of all impressions, were early developed. He seemed to learn by intuition. Indolence, as in his after life, alternated with brief efforts of strenuous exertion. His want of sight prevented him from sharing in the ordinary childish sports; and one of his great pleasures was in reading old romances—a taste which he retained through life. Boys of this temperament are generally despised by their fellows; but Johnson seems to have had the power of enforcing the respect of his companions. Three of the lads used to come for him in the morning and carry him in triumph to school, seated upon the shoulders of one and supported on each side by his companions.

After learning to read at a dame-school, and from a certain Tom Brown, of whom it is only recorded that he published a spelling-book and dedicated it to the Universe, young Samuel was sent to the Lichfield Grammar School, and was afterwards, for a short time, apparently in the character of pupil-teacher, at the school of Stourbridge, in Worcestershire. A good deal of Latin was "whipped into him," and though he complained of the excessive severity of two of his teachers, he was always a believer in the virtues of the rod. A child, he said, who is flogged, "gets his task, and there's an end on't; whereas by exciting emulation and comparisons of superiority,

you lay the foundations of lasting mischief; you make brothers and sisters hate each other." In practice, indeed, this stern disciplinarian seems to have been specially indulgent to children. The memory of his own sorrows made him value their happiness, and he rejoiced greatly when he at last persuaded a schoolmaster to remit the old-fashioned holiday-task.

Johnson left school at sixteen and spent two years at home, probably in learning his father's business. This seems to have been the chief period of his studies. Long afterwards he said that he knew almost as much at eighteen as he did at the age of fifty-three —the date of the remark. His father's shop would give him many opportunities, and he devoured what came in his way with the undiscriminating eagerness of a young student. His intellectual resembled his physical appetite. He gorged books. He tore the hearts out of them, but did not study systematically. Do you read books through? he asked indignantly of some one who expected from him such supererogatory labour. His memory enabled him to accumulate great stores of a desultory and unsystematic knowledge. Somehow he became a fine Latin scholar, though never first rate as a Grecian. The direction of his studies was partly determined by the discovery of a folio of Petrarch, lying on a shelf where he was looking for apples; and one of his earliest literary plans, never carried out, was an edition of Politian, with a history of Latin poetry from the time of Petrarch. When he went to the University at the end of this period, he was in possession of a very unusual amount of reading.

Meanwhile he was beginning to feel the pressure of poverty. His father's affairs were probably getting into disorder. One anecdote—it is one which it is difficult to read without emotion—refers to this period. Many years afterwards, Johnson, worn by disease and the hard struggle of life, was staying at Lichfield, where a few old friends still survive, but in which every street must have revived the memories of the many who had long since gone over to the majority. He was missed one morning at breakfast, and did not return till supper-time. Then he told how his time had been passed. On that day fifty years before, his father, confined by illness, had begged him to take his place to sell books at a stall at Uttoxeter. Pride made him refuse. "To do away with the sin of this disobedience, I this day went in a post-chaise to Uttoxeter, and going into the market at the time of high business, uncovered my head and stood with it bare an hour before the stall which my father had formerly used, exposed to the sneers of the standers-by and the inclemency of the weather; a penance by which I trust I have propitiated Heaven for this only instance, I believe, of contumacy to my father." If the anecdote illustrates the touch of superstition in Johnson's mind, it reveals too that sacred depth of tenderness which ennobled his character. No repentance can ever wipe out the past or make it be as though it had not been; but the remorse of a fine character may be transmuted into a permanent source of nobler views of life and the world.

There are difficulties in determining the circumstances and duration of Johnson's stay at Oxford. He began residence at Pembroke College in 1728. It seems probable that he received some assistance from a gentleman whose son took him as companion, and from the clergy of Lichfield, to whom his father was known, and who were aware of the son's talents. Possibly his college assisted him during part of the time. It is certain that he left without taking a degree, though he probably resided for nearly three years. It is certain, also, that his father's bankruptcy made his stay difficult, and that the period must have been one of trial.

The effect of the Oxford residence upon Johnson's mind was characteristic. The lad already suffered from the attacks of melancholy, which sometimes drove him to the borders of insanity. At Oxford, Law's *Serious Call* gave him the strong religious impressions which remained through life. But he does not seem to have been regarded as a gloomy or a religious youth by his contemporaries. When told in after years that he had been described as a "gay and frolicsome fellow," he replied, "Ah! sir, I was mad and violent. It was bitterness which they mistook for frolic. I was miserably poor, and I thought to fight my way by my literature and my wit; so I disregarded all power and all authority." Though a hearty supporter of authority in principle, Johnson was distinguished through life by the strongest spirit of personal independence and self-respect. He held, too, the sound doctrine, deplored by his respectable biographer Hawkins, that the scholar's life, like the Christian's, levelled all distinctions of rank. When an officious benefactor put a pair of new shoes at his door, he threw them away with indignation. He seems to have treated his tutors with a contempt which Boswell politely attributed to "great fortitude of mind," but Johnson himself set down as "stark insensibility." The life of a poor student is not, one may fear, even yet exempt from much bitterness, and in those days the position was far more servile than at present. The servitors and sizars had much to bear from richer companions. A proud melancholy lad, conscious of great powers, had to meet with hard rebuffs, and tried to meet them by returning scorn for scorn.

Such distresses, however, did not shake Johnson's rooted Toryism. He fully imbibed, if he did not already share, the strongest prejudices of the place, and his misery never produced a revolt against the system, though it may have fostered insolence to individuals. Three of the most eminent men with whom Johnson came in contact in later life, had also been students at Oxford. Wesley, his senior by six years, was a fellow of Lincoln whilst Johnson was an undergraduate, and was learning at Oxford the necessity of rousing his countrymen from the religious lethargy into which they had sunk. "Have not pride and haughtiness of spirit, impatience, and peevishness, sloth and indolence, gluttony and sensuality, and even a proverbial uselessness been objected to us, perhaps not always by our enemies nor wholly without ground?" So said Wes-

ley, preaching before the University of Oxford in 1744 and the words in his mouth imply more than the preacher's formality. Adam Smith, Johnson's junior by fourteen years, was so impressed by the utter indifference of Oxford authorities to their duties, as to find in it an admirable illustration of the consequences of the neglect of the true principles of supply and demand implied in the endowment of learning. Gibbon, his junior by twenty-eight years, passed at Oxford the "most idle and unprofitable" months of his whole life; and was, he said, as willing to disclaim the university for a mother, as she could be to renounce him for a son. Oxford, as judged by these men, was remarkable as an illustration of the spiritual and intellectual decadence of a body which at other times has been a centre of great movements of thought. Johnson, though his experience was rougher than any of the three, loved Oxford as though she had not been a harsh step-mother to his youth. Sir, he said fondly of his college, "we are a nest of singing-birds." Most of the strains are now pretty well forgotten, and some of them must at all times have been such as we scarcely associate with the nightingale. Johnson, however, cherished his college friendships, delighted in paying visits to his old university, and was deeply touched by the academical honours by which Oxford long afterwards recognised an eminence scarcely fostered by its protection. Far from sharing the doctrines of Adam Smith, he only regretted that the universities were not richer, and expressed a desire which will be understood by advocates of the "endowment of research," that there were many places of a thousand a year at Oxford.

On leaving the University, in 1731, the world was all before him. His father died in the end of the year, and Johnson's whole immediate inheritance was twenty pounds. Where was he to turn for daily bread? Even in those days, most gates were barred with gold and opened but to golden keys. The greatest chance for a poor man was probably through the Church. The career of Warburton, who rose from a similar position to a bishopric might have been rivalled by Johnson, and his connexions with Lichfield might, one would suppose, have helped him to a start. It would be easy to speculate upon causes which might have hindered such a career. In later life, he more than once refused to take orders upon the promise of a living. Johnson, as we know him, was a man of the world; though a religious man of the world. He represents the secular rather than the ecclesiastical type. So far as his mode of teaching goes, he is rather a disciple of Socrates than of St. Paul or Wesley. According to him, a "tavern-chair" was "the throne of human felicity," and supplied a better arena than the pulpit for the utterance of his message to mankind. And, though his external circumstances doubtless determined his method, there was much in his character which made it congenial. Johnson's religious emotions were such as to make habitual reserve almost a sanitary necessity. They were deeply coloured by his constitutional melancholy. Fear of death and hell were prominent in his personal creed. To trade upon his feelings like a charlatan would have

been abhorrent to his masculine character; and to give them full and frequent utterance like a genuine teacher of mankind would have been to imperil his sanity. If he had gone through the excitement of a Methodist conversion, he would probably have ended his days in a madhouse.

Such considerations, however, were not, one may guess, distinctly present to Johnson himself; and the offer of a college fellowship or of private patronage might probably have altered his career. He might have become a learned recluse or a struggling Parson Adams. College fellowships were less open to talent then than now, and patrons were never too propitious to the uncouth giant, who had to force his way by sheer labour, and fight for his own hand. Accordingly, the young scholar tried to coin his brains into money by the most depressing and least hopeful of employments. By becoming an usher in a school, he could a least turn his talents to account with little delay, and that was the most pressing considerations. By one schoolmaster he was rejected on the ground that his infirmities would excite the ridicule of the boys. Under another he passed some months of "complicated misery," and could never think of the school without horror and aversion. Finding this situation intolerable, he settled in Birmingham, in 1733, to be near an old schoolfellow, named Hector, who was apparently beginning to practise as a surgeon. Johnson seems to have had some acquaintances among the comfortable families in the neighbourhood; but his means of living are obscure. Some small literary work came in his way. He contributed essays to a local paper, and translated a book of Travels in Abyssinia. For this, his first publication, he received five guineas. In 1734 he made certain overtures to Cave, a London publisher, of the result of which I shall have to speak presently. For the present it is pretty clear that the great problem of self-support had been very inadequately solved.

Having no money and no prospects, Johnson naturally married. The attractions of the lady were not very manifest to others than her husband. She was the widow of a Birmingham mercer named Porter. Her age at the time (1735) of the second marriage was forty-eight, the bridegroom being not quite twenty-six. The biographer's eye was not fixed upon Johnson till after his wife's death, and we have little in the way of authentic description of her person and character. Garrick, who had known her, said that she was very fat, with cheeks coloured both by paint and cordials, flimsy and fantastic in dress and affected in her manners. She is said to have treated her husband with some contempt, adopting the airs of an antiquated beauty, which he returned by elaborate deference. Garrick used his wonderful powers of mimicry to make fun of the uncouth caresses of the husband, and the courtly Beauclerc used to provoke the smiles of his audience by repeating Johnson's assertion that "it was a love-match on both sides." One incident of the wedding-day was ominous. As the newly-married couple rode back from church, Mrs. Johnson showed her

spirit by reproaching her husband for riding too fast, and then for lagging behind. Resolved "not to be made the slave of caprice," he pushed on briskly till he was fairly out of sight. When she rejoined him, as he, of course, took care that she should soon do, she was in tears. Mrs. Johnson apparently knew how to gain supremacy: but, at any rate, Johnson loved her devotedly during life, and clung to her memory during a widowhood of more than thirty years, as fondly as if they had been the most pattern hero and heroine of romantic fiction.

Whatever Mrs. Johnson's charms, she seems to have been a woman of good sense and some literary judgment. Johnson's grotesque appearance did not prevent her from saying to her daughter on their first introduction, "This is the most sensible man I ever met." Her praises were, we may believe, sweeter to him than those of the severest critics, or the most fervent of personal flatterers. Like all good men, Johnson loved good women, and liked to have on hand a flirtation or two, as warm as might be within the bounds of due decorum. But nothing affected his fidelity to his Letty or displaced her image in his mind. He remembered her in many solemn prayers, and such words as "this was dear Letty's book:" or, "this was a prayer which dear Letty was accustomed to say," were found written by him in many of her books of devotion.

Mrs. Johnson had one other recommendation—a fortune, namely, of £800—little enough, even then, as a provision for the support of the married pair, but enough to help Johnson to make a fresh start. In 1736, there appeared an advertisement in the *Gentleman's Magazine*. "At Edial, near Lichfield, in Staffordshire, young gentlemen are boarded and taught the Latin and Greek languages by Samuel Johnson." If, as seems probable, Mrs Johnson's money supplied the funds for this venture, it was an unlucky speculation.

Johnson was not fitted to be a pedagogue. Success in that profession implies skill in the management of pupils, but perhaps still more decidedly in the management of parents. Johnson had little qualifications in either way. As a teacher he would probably have been alternately despotic and over-indulgent; and, on the other hand, at a single glance the rough Dominie Sampson would be enough to frighten the ordinary parent off his premises. Very few pupils came, and they seem to have profited little, if a story as told of two of his pupils refers to this time. After some months of instruction in English history, he asked them who had destroyed the monasteries? One of them gave no answer; the other replied "Jesus Christ." Johnson, however, could boast of one eminent pupil in David Garrick, though, by Garrick's account, his master was of little service except as affording an excellent mark for his early powers of ridicule. The school, or "academy," failed after a year and a half; and Johnson, once more at a loss for employment, resolved to try the great experiment, made so often and so often unsuccessfully. He left Lichfield to seek his fortune in London. Garrick accompanied him, and the two brought a common

letter of introduction to the master of an academy from Gilbert Walmsley, registrar of the Prerogative Court in Lichfield. Long afterwards Johnson took an opportunity in the *Lives of the Poets*, of expressing his warm regard for the memory of his early friend, to whom he had been recommended by a community of literary tastes, in spite of party differences and great inequality of age. Walmsley says in his letter, that "one Johnson" is about to accompany Garrick to London, in the order to try his fate with a tragedy and get himself employed in translation. Johnson, he adds, "is a very good scholar and poet, and I have great hopes will turn out a fine tragedy writer."

The letter is dated March 2nd, 1737. Before recording what is known of his early career thus started, it will be well to take a glance at the general condition of the profession of Literature in England at this period.

CHAPTER II.

LITERARY CAREER.

"No man but a blockhead," said Johnson, "ever wrote except for money." The doctrine is, of course, perfectly outrageous, and specially calculated to shock people who like to keep it for their private use, instead of proclaiming it in public. But it is a good expression of that huge contempt for the foppery of high-flown sentiment which, as is not uncommon with Johnson, passes into something which would be cynical if it were not half-humorous. In this case it implies also the contempt of the professional for the amateur. Johnson despised gentlemen who dabbled in his craft, as a man whose life is devoted to music or painting despises the ladies and gentlemen who treat those arts as fashionable accomplishments. An author was, according to him, a man who turned out books as a bricklayer turns out houses or a tailor coats. So long as he supplied a good article and got a fair price, he was a fool to grumble, and a humbug to affect loftier motives.

Johnson was not the first professional author, in this sense, but perhaps the first man who made the profession respectable. The principal habitat of authors, in his age, was Grub Street—a region which, in later years, has ceased to be ashamed of itself, and has adopted the more pretentious name Bohemia. The original Grub Street, it is said, first became associated with authorship during the increase of pamphlet literature, produced by the civil wars. Fox, the martyrologist, was one of its original inhabitants. Another of its heroes was a certain Mr. Welby, of whom the sole record is, that he "lived there forty years without being seen of any." In fact, it was a region of holes and corners, calculated to illustrate that great advantage of London life, which a friend of Boswell's described by saying, that a man could there be always "close to his burrow." The "burrow" which received the luckless wight, was indeed no pleasant refuge. Since poor Green, in the earliest generation of dramatists, bought his "groat's worth of wit with a million of repentance," too many of his brethren had trodden the path which led to hopeless misery or death in a tavern brawl. The history of men who had to support themselves by their pens, is a record of almost universal gloom. The names of Spenser, of Butler and of Otway, are enough to remind us that even warm contem-

porary recognition was not enough to raise an author above the fear of dying in want of necessaries. The two great dictators of literature, Ben Johnson in the earlier and Dryden in the later part of the century, only kept their heads above water by help of the laureate's pittance, though reckless imprudence, encouraged by the precarious life, was the cause of much of their sufferings. Patronage gave but a fitful resource, and the author could hope at most but an occasionable crust, flung to him from better provided tables.

In the happy days of Queen Anne, it is true, there had been a gleam of prosperity. Many authors, Addison, Congreve, Swift, and others of less name, had won by their pens not only temporary profits but permanent places. The class which came into power at the Revolution was willing for a time, to share some of the public patronage with men distinguished for intellectual eminence. Patronage was liberal when the funds came out of other men's pockets. But, as the system of party government developed, it soon became evident that this involved a waste of power. There were enough political partisans to absorb all the comfortable sinecures to be had; and such money as was still spent upon literature, was given in return for services equally degrading to giver and receiver. Nor did the patronage of literature reach the poor inhabitants of Grub Street. Addison's poetical power might suggest or justify the gift of a place from his elegant friends; but a man like De Foe, who really looked to his pen for great part of his daily subsistence, was below the region of such prizes, and was obliged in later years not only to write inferior books for money, but to sell himself and act as a spy upon his fellows. One great man, it is true, made an independency by literature. Pope received some £8000 for his translation of Homer, by the then popular mode of subscription—a kind of compromise between the systems of patronage and public support. But his success caused little pleasure in Grub Street. No love was lost between the poet and the dwellers in this dismal region. Pope was its deadliest enemy, and carried on an internecine warfare with its inmates, which has enriched our language with a great satire, but which wasted his powers upon low objects, and tempted him into disgraceful artifices. The life of the unfortunate victims, pilloried in the *Dunciad* and accused of the unpardonable sins of poverty and dependence, was too often one which might have extorted sympathy even from a thin-skinned poet and critic.

Illustrations of the manners and customs of that Grub Street of which Johnson was to become an inmate are only too abundant. The best writers of the day could tell of hardships endured in that dismal region. Richardson went on the sound principle of keeping his shop that his shop might keep him. But the other great novelists of the century have painted from life the miseries of an author's existence. Fielding, Smollett, and Goldsmith have described the poor wretches with a vivid force which gives sadness to the reflection that each of those great men was drawing upon his own experience, and that they each died in distress. The *Case of Authors by Profession* to quote the title of a pamphlet by Ralph, was indeed

a wretched one, when the greatest of their number had an incessant struggle to keep the wolf from the door. The life of an author resembled the proverbial existence of the flying-fish, chased by enemies in sea and in air; he only escaped from the slavery of the bookseller's garret, to fly from the bailiff or rot in the debtor's ward or the spunging-house. Many strange half-pathetic and half-ludicrous anecdotes survive to recall the sorrows and the recklessness of the luckless scribblers who, like one of Johnson's acquaintance, "lived in London and hung loose upon society."

There was Samuel Boyse, for example, whose poem on the *Deity* is quoted with high praise by Fielding. Once Johnson had generously exerted himself for his comrade in misery, and collected enough money by sixpences to get the poet's clothes out of pawn. Two days afterwards, Boyse had spent the money and was found in bed, covered only with a blanket, through two holes in which he passed his arms to write. Boyse, it appears, when still in this position would lay out his last half-guinea to buy truffles and mushrooms for his last scrap of beef. Of another scribbler Johnson said, "I honour Derrick for his strength of mind. One night when Floyd (another poor author) was wandering about the streets at night, he found Derrick fast asleep upon a bulk. Upon being suddenly awaked, Derrick started up; 'My dear Floyd, I am sorry to see you in this destitute state; will you go home with me to my *lodgings?*'" Authors in such circumstances might be forced into such a wonderful contract as that which is reported to have been drawn up by one Gardner with Rolt and Christopher Smart. They were to write a monthly miscellany, sold at sixpence, and to have a third of the profits; but they were to write nothing else, and the contract was to last for ninety-nine years. Johnson himself summed up the trade upon earth by the lines in which Virgil describes the entrance to hell; thus translated by Dryden:—

> Just in the gate and in the jaws of hell,
> Revengeful cares and sullen sorrows dwell.
> And pale diseases and repining age,
> Want, fear, and famine's unresisted rage:
> Here toils and Death and Death's half-brother, Sleep—
> Forms, terrible to view, their sentry keep.

"Now," said Johnson, "almost all these apply exactly to an author: these are the concomitants of a printing-house."

Judicious authors, indeed, were learning how to make literature pay. Some of them belonged to the class who understood the great truth that the scissors are a very superior implement to the pen considered as a tool of literary trade. Such, for example, was that respectable Dr. John Campbell, whose parties Johnson ceased to frequent lest Scotchmen should say of any good bits of work, "Ay, ay, he has learnt this of Cawmell." Campbell, he said quaintly, was a good man, a pious man. "I am afraid he has not been in the inside of a church for many years; but he never passes a church without pulling off his hat. This shows he has good prin-

ciples,"—of which in fact there seems to be some less questionable evidence. Campbell supported himself by writings chiefly of the Encyclopedia or Gazetteer kind; and became, still in Johnson's phrase, "the richest author that ever grazed the common of literature." A more singular and less reputable character was that impudent quack, Sir John Hill, who, with his insolent attacks upon the Royal Society, pretentious botanical and medical compilations, plays, novels, and magazine articles, has long sunk into utter oblivion. It is said of him that he pursued every branch of literary quackery with greater contempt of character than any man of his time, and that he made as much as £1500 in a year:—three times as much, it is added, as any one writer ever made in the same period.

The political scribblers—the Arnalls, Gordons, Trenchards, Guthries, Ralphs, and Amhersts, whose names meet us in the notes to the *Dunciad* and in contemporary pamphlets and newspapers—form another variety of the class. Their general character may be estimated from Johnson's classification of the "Scribbler for a Party" with the "Commissoner of Excise," as the "two lowest of all human beings." "Ralph," says one of the notes to the *Dunciad*, "ended in the common sink of all such writers, a political newspaper." The prejudice against such employment has scarcely died out in our own day, and may be still traced in the account of Pendennis and his friend Warrington. People who do dirty work must be paid for it; and the Secret Committee which inquired into Walpole's administration reported that in ten years, from 1731 to 1741, a sum of £50,077 18*s.* had been paid to writers and printers of newspapers. Arnall, now remembered chiefly by Pope's line,—

Spirit of Arnall, aid me whilst I lie!

had received, in four years, £10,997 6*s.* 8*d.* of this amount. The more successful writers might look to pensions or preferment. Francis, for example, the translator of Horace, and the father, in all probability, of the most formidable of the whole tribe of such literary gladiators, received, it is said, £900 a year for his work, besides being appointed to a rectory and the chaplaincy of Chelsea.

It must, moreover, be observed that the price of literary work wrs rising during the century, and that, in the latter half, considerable sums were received by successful writers. Religious as well as dramatic literature had begun to be commercially valuable. Baxter, in the previous century, made from £60 to £80 a year by his pen. The copyright of Tillotson's *Sermons* was sold, it is said, upon his death for £2500. Considerable sums were made by the plan of publishing by subscription. It is said that 4600 people subscribed to the two posthumous volumes of Conybeare's *Sermons*. A few poets trod in Pope's steps. Young made more than £3000 for the Satires called the *Universal Passion*, published, I think, on the same plan; and the Duke of Wharton is said, though

the report is doubtful, to have given him £2000 for the same work Gay made £1000 by his *Poems;* £400 for the copyright of the *Beggar's Opera*, and three times as much for its second part, *Polly*. Among historians, Hume seems to have received £700 a volume; Smollett made £2000 by his catchpenny rival publication; Henry made £3300 by his history; and Robertson, after the booksellers had made £6000 by his *Henry of Scotland*, sold his *Charles V.* for £4500. Amongst the novelists, Fielding received £700 for *Tom Jones* and £1000 for *Amelia;* Sterne, for the second edition of the first part of *Tristam Shandy* and for two additional volumes, received £650; besides which Lord Fauconberg gave him a living (most inappropriate acknowledgment one would say!), and Warburton a purse of gold. Goldsmith received 60 guineas for the immortal *Vicar*, a fair price, according to Johnson, for a work by a then unknown author. By each of his plays he made about £500, and for the eight volumes of his *Natural History* he received 800 guineas. Towards the end of the century, Mrs. Radcliffe got £500 for the *Mysteries of Udolpho*, and £800 for her last work, the *Italian*. Perhaps the largest sum given for a single book was £6000 paid to Hawkesworth for his account of the South Sea Expeditions. Horne Tooke received from £4000 to £5000 for the *Diversions of Purley;* and it is added by his biographer, though it seems to be incredible, that Hayley received no less than £11,000 for the *Life of Cowper*. This was, of course, in the present century, when we are already approaching the period of Scott and Byron.

Such sums prove that some few authors might achieve independence by a successful work; and it is well to remember them in considering Johnson's life from the business point of view. Though he never grumbled at the booksellers, and on the contrary, was always ready to defend them as liberal men, he certainly failed, whether from carelessness or want of skill, to turn them to as much profit as many less celebrated rivals. Meanwhile, pecuniary success of this kind was beyond any reasonable hopes. A man who has to work like his own dependent Levett, and to make the "modest toil of every day" supply "the wants of every day," must discount his talents until he can secure leisure for some more sustained effort. Johnson, coming up from the country to seek for work, could have but a slender prospect of rising above the ordinary level of his Grub Street companions and rivals. One publisher to to whom he applied suggested to him that it would be his wisest course to buy a porter's knot and carry trunks; and, in the struggle which followed, Johnson must sometimes have been tempted to regret that the advice was not taken.

The details of the ordeal through which he was now to pass have naturally vanished. Johnson, long afterwards, burst into tears on recalling the trials of this period. But, at the time, no one was interested in noting the history of an obscure literary drudge, and it has not been described by the sufferer himself. What we know is derived from a few letters and incidental references of Johnson

in later days. On first arriving in London he was almost destitute, and had to join with Garrick in raising a loan of five pounds, which we are glad to say, was repaid. He dined for eightpence, at an ordinary: a cut of meat for sixpence, bread for a penny, and a penny to the waiter, making out the charge. One of his acquaintance had told him that a man might live in London for thirty pounds a year. Ten pounds would pay for clothes; a garret might be hired for eighteen-pence a week; if any one asked for an address, it was easy to reply, "I am to be found at such a place." Threepence laid out at a coffee-house would enable him to pass some hours a day in good company; dinner might be had for sixpence, a bread-and-milk breakfast for a penny, and supper was superfluous. On clean shirt day you might go abroad and pay visits. This leaves a surplus of nearly one ponnd from the thirty.

Johnson, however, had a wife to support; and to raise funds for even so ascetic a mode of existence required steady labour. Often, it seems, his purse was at the very lowest ebb. One of his letters to his employer is signed *impransus;* and whether or not the dinnerless condition was in this case accidental, or significant of absolute impecuniosity, the less pleasant interpretation is not improbable. He would walk the streets all night with his friend Savage, when their combined funds could not pay for a lodging. One night, as he told Sir Joshua Reynolds in later years, they thus perambulated St. James's Square, warming themselves by declaiming against Walpole, and nobly resolved that they would stand by their country.

Patriotic enthusiasm, however, as no one knew better than Johnson, is a poor substitute for bed and supper. Johnson suffered acutely and made some attempts to escape from his misery. To the end of his life, he was grateful to those who had lent him a helping hand. "Harry Hervey," he said of one of them shortly before his death, "was a vicious man, but very kind to me. If you call a dog Hervey, I shall love him." Pope was impressed by the excellence of his first poem, *London*, and induced Lord Gower to write to a friend to beg Swift to obtain a degree for Johnson from the University of Dublin. The terms of this circuitous application, curious, as bringing into connexion three of the most eminent men of letters of the day, prove that the youngest of them was at the time (1739) in deep distress. The object of the degree was to qualify Johnson for a mastership of £60 a year, which would make him happy for life. He would rather, said Lord Gower, die upon the road to Dublin if an examination were necessary, "than be starved to death in translating for booksellers, which has been his only subsistence for some time past." The application failed, however, and the want of a degree was equally fatal to another application to be admitted to practise at Doctor's Commons.

Literature was thus perforce Johnson's sole support; and by literature was meant, for the most part, drudgery of the kind indicated by the phrase, "translating for booksellers." While

still in Lichfield, Johnson had, as I have said, written to Cave, proposing to become a contributor to the *Gentleman's Magazine*. The letter was one of those which a modern editor receives by the dozen, and answers as perfunctorily as his conscience will allow. It seems, however, to have made some impression upon Cave, and possibly led to Johnson's employment by him on his first arrival in London. From 1738 he was employed both on the Magazine and in some jobs of translation.

Edward Cave, to whom we are thus introduced, was a man of some mark in the history of literature. Johnson always spoke of him with affection and afterwards wrote his life in complimentary terms. Cave, though a clumsy, phlegmatic person of little cultivation, seems to have been one of those men who, whilst destitute of real critical powers, have a certain instinct for recognising the commercial value of literary wares. He had become by this time well-known as the publisher of a magazine which survives to this day. Journals containing summaries of passing events had already been started. Boyer's *Political State of Great Britain* began in 1711. *The Historical Register*, which added to a chronicle some literary notices, was started in 1716. *The Grub Street Journal* was another journal with fuller critical notices, which first appeared in 1730; and these two seem to have been superseded by the *Gentleman's Magazine*, started by Cave in the next year. Johnson saw in it an opening for the employment of his literary talents; and regarded its contributions with that awe so natural in youthful aspirants, and at once so comic and pathetic to writers of a little experience. The names of many of Cave's staff are preserved in a note to Hawkins. One or two of them, such as Birch and Akenside, have still a certain interest for students of literature; but few have heard of the great Moses Brown, who was regarded as the great poetical light of the magazine. Johnson looked up to him as a leader in his craft, and was graciously taken by Cave to an alehouse in Clerkenwell, where, wrapped in a horseman's coat, and "a great bushy uncombed wig," he saw Mr. Brown sitting at the end of a long table, in a cloud of tobacco-smoke, and felt the satisfaction of a true hero-worshipper.

It is needless to describe in detail the literary task-work done by Johnson at this period, the Latin poems which he contributed in praise of Cave, and of Cave's friends, or the Jacobite squibs by which he relieved his anti-ministerialist feelings. One incident of the period doubtless refreshed the soul of many authors, who have shared Campbell's gratitude to Napoleon for the sole redeeming action of his life—the shooting of a bookseller. Johnson was employed by Osborne, a rough specimen of the trade, to make a catalogue of the Harleian Library. Osborne offensively reproved him for negligence, and Johnson knocked him down with a folio. The book with which the feat was performed (*Biblia Græca Septuaginta, fol.* 1594, Frankfort) was in existence in a bookseller's shop at Cambridge in 1812, and should surely have been placed in some safe author's museum.

The most remarkable of Johnson's performances as a hack writer deserves a brief notice. He was one of the first of reporters. Cave published such reports of the debates in Parliament as were then allowed by the jealousy of the Legislature, under the title of *The Senate of Lilliput.* Johnson was the author of the debates from Nov. 1740 to February 1742. Persons were employed to attend in the two Houses, who brought home notes of the speeches, which were then put into shape by Johnson. Long afterwards, at a dinner at Foote's, Francis (the father of Junius) mentioned a speech of Pitt's as the best he had ever read, and superior to anything in Demosthenes. Hereupon Johnson replied, "I wrote that speech in a garret in Exeter Street." When the company applauded not only his eloquence but his impartiality, Johnson replied, "That is not quite true; I saved appearances tolerably well, but I took care that the Whig dogs should not have the best of it." The speeches passed for a time as accurate; though, in truth, it has been proved and it is easy to observe, that they are, in fact, very vague reflections of the original. The editors of Chesterfield's Works published two of the speeches, and, to Johnson's considerable amusement, declared that one of them resembled Demosthenes and the other Cicero. It is plain enough to the modern reader that, if so, both of the ancient orators must have written true Johnsonese; and, in fact, the style of the true author is often as plainly marked in many of these compositions as in the *Rambler* or *Rasselas.* For this deception, such as it was, Johnson expressed penitence at the end of his life, though he said that he had ceased to write when he found that they were taken as genuine. He would not be "accessory to the propagation of falsehood."

Another of Johnson's works which appeared in 1744 requires notice both for its intrinsic merit, and its autobiographical interest. The most remarkable of his Grub-Street companions was the Richard Savage already mentioned. Johnson's life of him written soon after his death is one of his most forcible performances, and the best extant illustration of the life of the struggling authors of the time. Savage claimed to be the illegitimate son of the Countess of Macclesfield, who was divorced from her husband in the year of his birth on account of her connexion with his supposed father, Lord Rivers. According to the story, believed by Johnson and published without her contradiction in the mother's lifetime, she not only disavowed her son, but cherished an unnatural hatred for him. She told his father that he was dead, in order that he might not be benefited by the father's will; she tried to have him kidnapped and sent to the plantations; and she did her best to prevent him from receiving a pardon when he had been sentenced to death for killing a man in a tavern brawl. However this may be, and there are reasons for doubt, the story was generally believed, and caused much sympathy for the supposed victim. Savage was at one time protected by the kindness of Steele, who published his story, and sometimes employed him as a literary assistant. When Steele became disgusted with him, he

received generous help from the actor Wilks and from Mrs. Oldfield, to whom he had been introduced by some dramatic efforts. Then he was taken up by Lord Tyrconnel, but abandoned by him after a violent quarrel; he afterwards called himself a volunteer laureate, and received a pension of 50*l.* a year from Queen Caroline; on her death he was thrown into deep distress, and helped by a subscription to which Pope was the chief contributor, on condition of retiring to the country. Ultimately he quarrelled with his last protectors, and ended by dying in a debtor's prison. Various poetical works, now utterly forgotten, obtained for him scanty profit. This career sufficiently reveals the character. Savage belonged to the very common type of men, who seem to employ their whole talents to throw away their chances in life, and to disgust every one who offers them a helping hand. He was, however, a man of some talent, though his poems are now hopelessly unreadable, and seems to have had a singular attraction for Johnson. The biography is curiously marked by Johnson's constant effort to put the best face upon faults, which he has too much love of truth to conceal. The explanation is, partly, that Johnson conceived himself to be avenging a victim of cruel oppression. "This mother," he says, after recording her vindictiveness, "is still alive, and may perhaps even yet, though her malice was often defeated, enjoy the pleasure of reflecting that the life, which she often endeavoured to destroy, was at last shortened by her maternal offices; that though she could not transport her son to the plantations, bury him in the shop of a mechanic, or hasten the hand of the public executioner, she has yet had the satisfaction of embittering all his hours, and forcing him into exigencies that hurried on his death."

But it is also probable that Savage had a strong influence upon Johnson's mind at a very impressible part of his career. The young man, still ignorant of life and full of reverent enthusiasm for the literary magnates of his time, was impressed by the varied experience of his companion, and, it may be, flattered by his intimacy. Savage, he says admiringly, had enjoyed great opportunities of seeing the most conspicuous men of the day in their private life. He was shrewd and inquisitive enough to use his opportunities well. "More circumstances to constitute a critic on human life could not easily concur." The only phrase which survives to justify this remark is Savage's statement about Walpole, that "the whole range of his mind was from obscenity to politics, and from politics to obscenity." We may, however, guess what was the special charm of the intercourse to Johnson. Savagewas an expert in that science of human nature, learnt from experience not from books, upon which Johnson set so high a value, and of which he was destined to become the authorised expositor. There were, moreover resemblances between the two men. They were both admired and sought out for their conversational powers. Savage, indeed, seems to have lived chiefly by the people who entertained him for talk, till he had disgusted them by his insolence and his utter disre-

gard of time and propriety. He would, like Johnson, sit up talking beyond midnight, and next day decline to rise till dinner-time, though his favourite drink was not, like Johnson's, free from intoxicating properties. Both of them had a lofty pride, which Johnson heartily commends in Savage, though he has difficulty in palliating some of its manifestations. One of the stories reminds us of an anecdote already related of Johnson himself. Some clothes had been left for Savage at a coffee-house by a person who, out of delicacy, concealed his name. Savage, however, resented some want of ceremony, and refused to enter the house again till the clothes had been removed.

What was honourable pride in Johnson was, indeed, simple arrogance in Savage. He asked favours, his biographer says, without submission, and resented refusal as an insult. He had too much pride to acknowledge, not too much to receive, obligations; enough to quarrel with his charitable benefactors, but not enough to make him rise to independence of their charity, His pension would have sufficed to keep him, only that as soon as he received it he retired from the sight of all his acquaintance, and came back before long as penniless as before. This conduct, observes his biographer, was "very particular." It was hardly so singular as objectionable; and we are not surprised to be told that he was rather a "friend of goodness" than himself a good man. In short, we may say of him as Beauclerk said of a friend of Boswell's that, if he had excellent principles, he did not wear them out in practice.

There is something quaint about this picture of a thorough-paced scamp, admiringly painted by a virtuous man; forced in spite of himself, to make it a likeness, and striving in vain to make it attractive. But it is also pathetic when we remember that Johnson shared some part at least of his hero's miseries. "On a bulk, in a cellar, or in a glass-house, among thieves and beggars, was to be found the author of *The Wanderer*, the man of exalted sentiments, extensive views, and curious observations; the man whose remarks on life might have assisted the statesman, whose ideas of virtue might have enlightened the moralist, whose eloquence might have influenced senators, and whose delicacy might have polished courts." Very shocking, no doubt, and yet hardly surprising under the circumstances! To us it is more interesting to remember that the author of the *Rambler* was not only a sympathiser, but a fellow-sufferer with the author of the *Wanderer*, and shared the queer "lodgings" of his friend, as Floyd shared the lodgings of Derrick. Johnson happily came unscathed through the ordeal which was too much for poor Savage, and could boast with perfect truth in later life that "no man, who ever lived by literature, had lived more independently than I have done." It was in so strange a school, and under such questionable teaching that Johnson formed his character of the world and of the conduct befitting its inmates. One characteristic conclusion is indicated in the opening passage of the life. It has always been observed, he says, that men eminent by nature or fortune are not generally happy: "whether

it be that apparent superiority incites great designs, and great designs are naturally liable to fatal miscarriages; or that the general lot of mankind is misery, and the misfortunes of those, whose eminence drew upon them an universal attention, have been more carefully recorded because they were more generally observed, and have in reality been only more conspicuous than those of others, not more frequent or more severe."

The last explanation was that which really commended itself to Johnson. Nobody had better reason to know that obscurity might conceal a misery as bitter as any that fell to the lot of the most eminent. The gloom due to his constitutional temperament was intensified by the sense that he and his wife were dependent upon the good will of a narrow and ignorant tradesman for the scantiest maintenance. How was he to reach some solid standing-ground above the hopeless mire of Grub Street? As a journeyman author he could make both ends meet, but only on condition of incessant labour. Illness and misfortune would mean constant dependence upon charity or bondage to creditors. To get ahead of the world it was necessary to distinguish himself in some way from the herd of needy competitors. He had come up from Lichfield with a play in his pocket, but the play did not seem at present to have much chance of emerging. Meanwhile he published a poem which did something to give him a general reputation.

London—an imitation of the Third Satire of Juvenal—was published in May, 1738. The plan was doubtless suggested by Pope's imitations of Horace, which had recently appeared. Though necessarily following the lines of Juvenal's poem, and conforming to the conventional fashion of the time, both in sentiment and versification, the poem has a biographical significance. It is indeed odd to find Johnson, who afterwards thought of London as a lover of his mistress, and who despised nothing more heartily than the cant of Rousseau and the sentimentalists, adopting in this poem the ordinary denunciations of the corruption of towns, and singing the praises of an innocent country life. Doubtless, the young writer was like other young men, taking up a strain still imitative and artificial. He has a quiet smile at Savage in the life, because in his retreat to Wales, that enthusiast declared that he "could not debar himself from the happiness which was to be found in the calm of a cottage, or lose the opportunity of listening without intermission to the melody of the nightingale, which he believed was to be heard from every bramble, and which he did not fail to mention as a very important part of the happiness of a country life." In *London*, this insincere cockney adopts Savage's view. Thales, who is generally supposed to represent Savage (and this coincidence seems to confirm the opinion), is to retire "from the dungeons of the Strand," and to end a healthy life in pruning walks and twining bowers in his garden.

> There every bush with nature's music rings,
> There every breeze bears health upon its wings.

Johnson had not yet learnt the value of perfect sincerity even in

poetry. But it must also be admitted that London, as seen by the poor drudge from a Grub Street garret, probably presented a prospect gloomy enough to make even Johnson long at times for rural solitude. The poem reflects, too, the ordinary talk of the heterogeneous band of patriots, Jacobites, and disappointed Whigs, who were beginning to gather enough strength to threaten Walpole's long tenure of power. Many references to contemporary politics illustrate Johnson's sympathy with the inhabitants of the contemporary Cave of Adullam.

This poem, as already stated, attracted Pope's notice, who made a curious note on a scrap of paper sent with it to a friend. Johnson is described as "a man afflicted with an infirmity of the convulsive kind, that attacks him sometimes so as to make him a sad spectacle." This seems to have been the chief information obtained by Pope about the anonymous author, of whom he had said, on first reading the poem, this man will soon be *déterré*. *London* made a certain noise; it reached a second edition in a week, and attracted various patrons, among others, General Oglethorpe, celebrated by Pope, and through a long life the warm friend of Johnson. One line, however, in the poem printed in capital letters, gives the moral which was doubtless most deeply felt by the author, and which did not lose its meaning in the years to come. This mournful truth, he says,—

> Is everywhere confess'd,
> Slow rises worth by poverty depress'd.

Ten years later (in January, 1749) appeared the *Vanity of Human Wishes*, an imitation of the Tenth Satire of Juvenal. The difference in tone shows how deeply this and similar truths had been impressed upon its author in the interval. Though still an imitation, it is as significant as the most original work could be of Johnson's settled views of life. It was written at a white heat, as indeed Johnson wrote all his best work. Its strong Stoical morality, its profound and melancholy illustrations of the old and ever new sentiment, *Vanitas Vanitatum*, make it perhaps the most impressive poem of the kind in the language. The lines on the scholar's fate show that the iron had entered his soul in the interval. Should the scholar succeed beyond expectation in his labours and escape melancholy and disease, yet, he says,—

> Yet hope not life from grief and danger free,
> Nor think the doom of man reversed on thee;
> Deign on the passing world to turn thine eyes
> And pause awhile from letters, to be wise;
> There mark what ills the scholar's life assail,
> Toil, envy, want, the patron and the jail;
> See nations slowly wise and meanly just,
> To buried merit raise the tardy bust.
> If dreams yet flatter, once again attend.
> Hear Lydiat's life and Galileo's end.

For the "patron," Johnson had originally written the "garret." The change was made after an experience of patronage to be presently described in connexion with the *Dictionary*.

For *London* Johnson received ten guineas, and for the *Vanity of Human Wishes* fifteen. Though indirectly valuable, as increasing his reputation, such work was not very profitable. The most promising career in a pecuniary sense was still to be found on the stage. Novelists were not yet the rivals of dramatists, and many authors had made enough by a successful play to float them through a year or two. Johnson had probably been determined by his knowledge of this fact to write the tragedy of *Irene*. No other excuse at least can be given for the composition of one of the heaviest and most unreadable of dramatic performances, interesting now, if interesting at all, solely as a curious example of the result of bestowing great powers upon a totally uncongenial task. Young men, however, may be pardoned for such blunders if they are not repeated, and Johnson, though he seems to have retained a fondness for his unlucky performance, never indulged in playwriting after leaving Lichfield. The best thing connected with the play was Johnson's retort to his friend Walmsley, the Lichfield registrar. "How," asked Walmsley, "can you contrive to plunge your heroine into deeper calamity?" "Sir," said Johnson, "I can put her into the spiritual court." Even Boswell can only say for *Irene* that it is "entitled to the praise of superior excellence," and admits its entire absence of dramatic power. Garrick, who had become manager of Drury Lane, produced his friend's work in 1749. The play was carried through nine nights by Garrick's friendly zeal, so that the author had his three nights' profits. For this he received £195 17*s*. and for the copy he had £100. People probably attended, as they attend modern representations of legitimate drama, rather from a sense of duty than in the hope of pleasure. The heroine originally had to speak two lines with a bowstring round her neck. The situation produced cries of murder, and she had to go off the stage alive. The objectionable passage was removed, but *Irene* was on the whole a failure, and has never, I imagine, made another appearance. When asked how he felt upon his ill-success, he replied "like the monument," and indeed he made it a principle throughout life to accept the decision of the public like a sensible man without murmurs.

Meanwhile, Johnson was already embarked upon an undertaking of a very different kind. In 1747 he had put forth a plan for an English Dictionary, addressed at the suggestion of Dodsley, to Lord Chesterfield, then Secretary of State, and the great contemporary Mæcenas. Johnson had apparently been maturing the scheme for some time. "I know," he says in the "plan," that "the work in which I engaged is generally considered as drudgery for the blind, as the proper toil of artless industry, a book that requires neither the light of learning nor the activity of genius, but may be successfully performed without any higher quality than that of bearing burdens with dull patience, and beating the track of the

alphabet with sluggish resolution." He adds in a sub-sarcastic tone, that although princes and statesmen had once thought it honourable to patronise dictionaries, he had considered such benevolent acts to be "prodigies, recorded rather to raise wonder than expectation," and he was accordingly pleased and surprised to find that Chesterfield took an interest in his undertaking. He proceeds to lay down the general principles upon which he intends to frame his work, in order to invite timely suggestions and repress unreasonable expectations. At this time, humble as his aspirations might be, he took a view of the possibilities open to him which had to be lowered before the publication of the dictionary. He shared the illusion that a language might be "fixed" by making a catalogue of its words. In the preface which appeared with the completed work, he explains very sensibly the vanity of any such expectation. Whilst all human affairs are changing, it is, as he says, absurd to imagine that the language which repeats all human thoughts and feelings can remain unaltered.

A dictionary, as Johnson conceived it, was in fact work for a "harmless drudge," the definition of a lexicographer given in the book itself. Etymology in a scientific sense was as yet non-existent, and Johnson was not in this respect ahead of his contemporaries. To collect all the words in the language, to define their meanings as accurately as might be, to give the obvious or whimsical guesses at Etymology suggested by previous writers, and to append a good collection of illustrative passages was the sum of his ambition. Any systematic training of the historical processes by which a particular language had been developed was unknown, and of course the result could not be anticipated. The work, indeed, required a keen logical faculty of definition, and wide reading of the English literature of the two preceding centuries; but it could of course give no play either for the higher literary faculties on points of scientific investigation. A dictionary in Johnson's sense was the highest kind of work to which a literary journeyman could be set, but it was still work for a journeyman, not for an artist. He was not adding to literature, but providing a useful implement for future men of letters.

Johnson had thus got on hand the biggest job that could be well undertaken by a good workman in his humble craft. He was to receive fifteen hundred and seventy-five pounds for the whole, and he expected to finish it in three years. The money, it is to be observed, was to satisfy not only Johnson but several copyists employed in the mechanical part of the work. It was advanced by instalments, and came to an end before the conclusion of the book. Indeed, it appeared when accounts were settled, that he had received a hundred pounds more than was due. He could, however, pay his way for the time, and would gain a reputation enough to ensure work in future. The period of extreme poverty had probably ended when Johnson got permanent employment on the *Gentleman's Magazine*. He was not elevated above the need of drudgery and economy, but he might at least be free from the

dread of neglect. He could command his market—such as it was The necessity of steady labour was probably unfelt in repelling his fits of melancholy. His name was beginning to be known, and men of reputation were seeking his acquaintance. In the winter of 1749 he formed a club, which met weekly at a "famous beefsteak house" in Ivy Lane. Among its members were Hawkins, afterwards his biographer, and two friends, Bathurst a physician, and Hawkesworth an author, for the first of whom he entertained an unusually strong affection. The Club, like its more famous successor, gave Johnson an opportunity of displaying and improving his great conversational powers. He was already dreaded for his prowess in argument, his dictatorial manners and vivid flashes of wit and humour, the more effective from the habitual gloom and apparent heaviness of the discourser.

The talk of this society probably suggested topics for the *Rambler*, which appeared at this time, and caused Johnson's fame to spread further beyond the literary circles of London. The wit and humour have, indeed, left few traces upon its ponderous pages, for the *Rambler* marks the culminating period of Johnson's worst qualities of style. The pompous and involved language seems indeed to be a fit clothing for the melancholy reflections which are its chief staple, and in spite of its unmistakable power it is as heavy reading as the heavy class of lay-sermonizing to which it belongs. Such literature, however, is often strangely popular in England, and the *Rambler*, though its circulation was limited, gave to Johnson his position as a great practical moralist. He took his literary title, one may say, from the *Rambler*, as the more familiar title was derived from the *Dictionary*.

The *Rambler* was published twice a week from March 20th, 1750, to March 14th, 1752. In five numbers alone he received assistance from friends, and one of these, written by Richardson, is said to have been the only number which had a large sale. The circulation rarely exceeded 500, though ten English editions were published in the author's lifetime, besides Scotch and Irish editions. The payment, however, namely, two guineas a number, must have been welcome to Johnson, and the friendship of many distinguished men of the time was a still more valuable reward. A quaint story illustrates the hero-worship of which Johnson now became the object. Dr. Burney, afterwards an intimate friend, had introduced himself to Johnson by letter in consequence of the *Rambler*, and the plan of the *Dictionary*. The admiration was shared by a friend of Burney's, a Mr. Bewley, known—in Norfolk at least—as the "philosopher of Massingham." When Burney at last gained the honour of a personal interview, he wished to procure some "relic" of Johnson for his friend. He cut off some bristles from a hearth-broom in the doctor's chambers, and sent them in a letter to his fellow-enthusiast. Long afterwards Johnson was pleased to hear of this simple-minded homage, and not only sent a copy of the *Lives of the Poets* to the rural philosopher, but deigned to grant him a personal interview.

Dearer than any such praise was the approval of Johnson's wife. She told him that, well as she had thought of him before, she had not considered him equal to such a performance. The voice that so charmed him was soon to be silenced forever. Mrs. Johnson died (March 17th, 1752) three days after the appearance of the last *Rambler*. The man who has passed through such a trial knows well that, whatever may be in store for him in the dark future, fate can have no heavier blow in reserve. Though Johnson once acknowledged to Boswell, when in a placid humour, that happier days had come to him in his old age than in his early life, he would probably have added that though fame and friendship and freedom from the harrowing cares of poverty might cause his life to be more equably happy, yet their rewards could represent but a faint and mocking reflection of the best moments of a happy marriage. His strong mind and tender nature reeled under the blow. Here is one pathetic little note written to the friend, Dr. Taylor, who had come to him in his distress. That which first announced the calamity, and which, said Taylor, "expressed grief in the strongest manner he had ever read," is lost.

"Dear Sir,—Let me have your company and instruction. Do not live away from me. My distress is great.

"Pray desire Mrs. Taylor to inform me what mourning I should buy for my mother and Miss Porter, and bring a note in writing with you.

"Remember me in your prayers, for vain is the help of man.

"I am, dear sir,

"SAM. JOHNSON."

We need not regret that a veil is drawn over the details of the bitter agony of his passage through the valley of the shadow of death. It is enough to put down the wails which he wrote long afterwards when vividly approaching the close of all human emotions and interests:—

"This is the day on which, in 1752, dear Letty died. I have now uttered a prayer of repentance and contrition; perhaps Letty knows that I prayed for her. Perhaps Letty is now praying for me. God help me. Thou, God, art merciful, hear my prayers and enable me to trust in Thee.

"We were married almost seventeen years, and have now been parted thirty."

It seems half profane, even at this distance of time, to pry into grief so deep and so lasting. Johnson turned for relief to that which all sufferers know to be the only remedy for sorrow—hard labour. He set to work in his garret, an inconvenient room, "because," he said, "in that room only I never saw Mrs. Johnson." He helped his friend Hawkesworth in the *Adventurer*, a new periodical of the *Rambler* kind; but his main work was the *Dictionary*, which came out at last in 1755. Its appearance was the occasion of an explosion of wrath which marks an epoch in our literature. Johnson, as we have seen, had dedicated the Plan

to Lord Chesterfield; and his language implies that they had been to some extent in personal communication. Chesterfield's fame is in curious antithesis to Johnson's. He was a man of great abilities, and seems to have deserved high credit for some parts of his statesmanship. As a Viceroy in Ireland in particular he showed qualities rare in his generation. To Johnson he was known as the nobleman who had a wide social influence as an acknowledged *arbiter elegantiarum*, and who reckoned among his claims some of that literary polish in which the earlier generation of nobles had certainly been superior to their successors. The art of life expounded in his *Letters* differs from Johnson as much as the elegant diplomatist differs from the rough intellectual gladiator of Grub Street. Johnson spoke his mind of his rival without reserve. "I thought," he said, "that this man had been a Lord among wits; but I find he is only a wit among Lords." And of the *Letters* he said more keenly that they taught the morals of a harlot and the manners of a dancing-master. Chesterfield's opinion of Johnson is indicated by the description in his *Letters* of a "respectable Hottentot, who throws his meat anywhere but down his throat. This absurd person," said Chesterfield, "was not only uncouth in manners and warm in dispute, but behaved exactly in the same way to superiors, equals, and inferiors; and therefore, by a necessary consequence, absurdly to two of the three. *Hinc illæ lacrymæ!*"

Johnson, in my opinion, was not far wrong in his judgment, though it would be a gross injustice to regard Chesterfield as nothing but a fribble. But men representing two such antithetic types were not likely to admire each other's good qualities. Whatever had been the intercourse between them, Johnson was naturally annoyed when the dignified noble published two articles in the *World*—a periodical supported by such polite personages as himself and Horace Walpole—in which the need of a dictionary was set forth, and various courtly compliments described Johnson's fitness for a dictatorship over the language. Nothing could be more prettily turned; but it meant, and Johnson took it to mean, I should like to have the dictionary dedicated to me: such a compliment would add a feather to my cap, and enable me to appear to the world as a patron of literature as well as an authority upon manners. "After making great professions," as Johnson said, "he had, for many years, taken no notice of me; but when my *Dictionary* was coming out, he fell a scribbling in the *World* about it." Johnson therefore bestowed upon the noble earl a piece of his mind in a letter which was not published till it came out in Boswell's biography.

"My Lord,—I have been lately informed by the proprietor of the *World* that two papers, in which my *Dictionary* is recommended to the public, were written by your lordship. To be so distinguished is an honour which, being very little accustomed to favours from the great, I know not well how to receive, or in what terms to acknowledge.

"When, upon some slight encouragement, I first visited your Lordship, I was overpowered, like the rest of mankind, by the enchantment of your address; and could not forbear to wish that I might boast myself, *le vainqueur du vainqueur de la terre*—that I might obtain that regard for which I saw the world contending; but I found my attendance so little encouraged that neither pride nor modesty would suffer me to continue it. When I had once addressed your Lordship in public, I had exhausted all the arts of pleasing which a wearied and uncourtly scholar can possess. I had done all that I could; and no man is well pleased to have his all neglected, be it ever so little.

"Seven years, my lord, have now passed, since I waited in your outward rooms and was repulsed from your door; during which time I have been pushing on my work through difficulties of which it is useless to complain, and have brought it at last to the verge of publication without one act of assistance, one word of encouragement, or one smile of favour. Such treatment I did not expect, for I never had a patron before.

"The shepherd in *Virgil* grew at last acquainted with Love, and found him a native of the rocks.

"Is not a patron, my Lord, one who looks with unconcern on a man struggling for life in the water, and when he has reached the ground encumbers him with help? The notice which you have been pleased to take of my labours, had it been early, had been kind; but it has been delayed till I am in different, and cannot enjoy it; till I am solitary, and cannot impart it; till I am known, and do not want it. I hope it is no very cynical asperity not to confess obligations where no benefit had been received, or to be unwilling that the public should consider me as owing that to a patron which Providence has enabled me to do for myself.

"Having carried on my work thus far with so little obligation to any favourer of learning, I shall not be disappointed though I should conclude it, should less be possible, with less; for I have been long wakened from that dream of hope in which I once boasted myself with so much exultation, my Lord,

"Your Lordship's most humble, most obedient servant,

"SAM JOHNSON."

The letter is one of those knock-down blows to which no answer is possible, and upon which comment is superfluous. It was, as Mr. Carlyle calls it, "the far-famed blast of doom proclaiming into the ear of Lord Chesterfield and through him, of the listening world, that patronage should be no more."

That is all that can be said; yet perhaps it should be added that Johnson remarked that he had once received £10 from Chesterfield, though he thought the assistance too inconsiderable to be mentioned in such a letter. Hawkins also states that Chesterfield sent overtures to Johnson through two friends, one of whom, long Sir Thomas Robinson, stated that, if he were rich enough (a judicious clause) he would himself settle £500 year upon Johnson. Johnson replied that if the first peer of the realm made such an offer, he

would show him the way downstairs. Hawkins is startled at this insolence, and at Johnson's uniform assertion that an offer of money was an insult. We cannot tell what was the history of the £10; but Johnson, in spite of Hawkins's righteous indignation, was in fact too proud to be a beggar, and owed to his pride his escape from the fate of Savage.

The appearance of the *Dictionary* placed Johnson in the position described soon afterwards by Smollett. He was henceforth "the great Cham of Literature"—a monarch sitting in the chair previously occupied by his namesake, Ben, by Dryden, and by Pope; but which has since that time been vacant. The world of literature has become too large for such authority. Complaints were not seldom uttered at the time. Goldsmith has urged that Boswell wished to make a monarchy of what ought to be a republic. Goldsmith, who would have been the last man to find serious fault with the dictator, thought the dictatorship objectionable. Some time indeed was still to elapse before we can say that Johnson was firmly seated on the throne; but the *Dictionary* and the *Rambler* had given him a position not altogether easy to appreciate, now that the *Dictionary* has been superseded and the *Rambler* gone out of fashion. His name was the highest at this time (1755) in the ranks of pure literature. The fame of Warburton possibly bulked larger for the moment, and one of his flatterers was comparing him to the Colossus which bestrides the petty world of contemporaries. But Warburton had subsided into episcopal repose, and literature had been for him a stepping-stone rather than an ultimate aim. Hume had written works of far more enduring influence than Johnson; but they were little read though generally abused, and scarcely belong to the purely literary history. The first volume of his *History of England* had appeared (1754), but had not succeeded. The second was just coming out. Richardson was still giving laws to his little seraglio of adoring women; Fielding had died (1754), worn out by labour and dissipation; Smollett was active in the literary trade, but not in such a way as to increase his own dignity or that of his employment; Gray was slowly writing a few lines of exquisite verse in his retirement at Cambridge; two young Irish adventurers, Burke and Goldsmith, were just coming to London to try their fortune; Adam Smith made his first experiment as an author by reviewing the *Dictionary* in the *Edinburgh Review;* Roberston had not yet appeared as a historian; Gibbon was at Lausanne repenting of his old brief lapse into Catholicism as an act of undergraduate's folly; and Cowper, after three years of "giggling and making giggle" with Thurlow in an attorney's office, was now entered at the Temple and amusing himself at times with literature in company with such small men of letters as Colman, Bonnell Thornton, and Lloyd. It was a slack tide of literature; the generation of Pope had passed away and left no successors, and no writer of the time could be put in competition with the giant now known as "Dictionary Johnson."

When the last sheet of the *Dictionary* had been carried to the publisher, Millar, Johnson asked the messenger, "What did he say?" "Sir," said the messenger, "he said, 'Thank God I have done with him'" "I am glad," replied Johnson, "that he thanks God for anything." Thankfulness for relief from seven years' toil seems to have been Johnson's predominant feeling: and he was not anxious for a time to take any new labours upon his shoulders. Some years passed which have left few traces either upon his personal or his literary history. He contributed a good many reviews in 1756–7 to the *Literary Magazine*, one of which, a review of Soame Jenyns, is amongst his best performances. To a weekly paper he contributed for two years, from April, 1758, to April, 1760, a set of essays called the *Idler*, on the old *Rambler* plan. He did some small literary cobbler's work, receiving a guinea for a prospectus to a newspaper and ten pounds for correcting a volume of poetry. He had advertised in 1756 a new edition of Shakspeare which was to appear by Christmas, 1757: but he dawdled over it so unconscionably that it did not appear for nine years; and then only in consequence of taunts from Churchill, who accused him with too much plausibility of cheating his subscribers.

> He for subscribers baits his hook;
> And takes your cash; but where's the book?
> No matter where; wise fear, you know
> Forbids the robbing of a foe;
> But what to serve our private ends
> Forbids the cheating of our friends?

In truth, his constitutional indolence seems to have gained advantages over him, when the stimulus of a heavy task was removed. In his meditations, there are many complaints of his "sluggishness" and resolutions of amendment. "A kind of strange oblivion has spread over me," he says in April, 1764, "so that I know not what has become of the last years, and perceive that incidents and intelligence pass over me without leaving any impression."

It seems, however, that he was still frequently in difficulties. Letters are preserved showing that in the beginning of 1756, Richardson became surety for him for a debt, and lent him six guineas to release him from arrest. An event which happened three years later illustrates his position and character. In January, 1759, his mother died at the age of ninety, Johnson was unable to come to Lichfield, and some deeply pathetic letters to her and her step-daughter, who lived with her, record his emotions. Here is the last sad farewell upon the snapping of the most sacred of human ties.

"Dear Honoured Mother," he says in a letter enclosed to Lucy Porter, the step-daughter, "neither your condition nor your character make it fit for me to say much. You have been the best mother, and I believe the best woman in the world. I thank you for your

indulgence to me, and beg forgiveness of all that I have done ill, and all that I have omitted to do well. God grant you His Holy Spirit, and receive you to everlasting happiness for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen. Lord Jesus receive your spirit. I am, dear, dear mother,

"Your dutiful son,

"SAMUEL JOHNSON.'

Johnson managed to raise twelve guineas, six of them borrowed from his printer, to send to his dying mother. In order to gain money for her funeral expenses and some small debts, he wrote the story of *Rasselas.* It was composed in the evenings of a single week, and sent to press as it was written. He received £100 for this, perhaps the most successful of his minor writings, and £25 for a second edition. It was widely translated and universally admired. One of the strangest of literary coincidences is the contemporary appearance of this work and Voltaire's *Candide;* to which, indeed, it bears in some respects so strong a resemblance that, but for Johnson's apparent contradiction, we would suppose that he had at least heard some description of its design. The two stories, though widely differing in tone and style, are among the most powerful expressions of the melancholy produced in strong intellects by the sadness and sorrows of the world. The literary excellence of *Candide* has secured for it a wider and more enduring popularity than has fallen to the lot of Johnson's far heavier production. But *Rasselas* is a book of singular force, and bears the most characteristic impression of Johnson's peculiar temperament.

A great change was approaching in Johnson's circumstances. When George III. came to the throne, it struck some of his advisers that it would be well, as Boswell puts it, to open "a new and brighter prospect to men of literary merit." This commendable design was carried out by offering to Johnson a pension of three hundred a year. Considering that such men as Horace Walpole and his like were enjoying sinecures of more than twice as many thousands for being their father's sons, the bounty does not strike one as excessively liberal. It seems to have been really intended as some set-off against other pensions bestowed upon various hangers-on of the Scotch prime minister, Bute. Johnson was coupled with the contemptible scribbler, Shebbeare, who had lately been in the pillory for a Jacobite libel (a "he-bear" and a "she-bear," said the facetious newspapers), and when a few months afterwards a pension of £200 a year was given to the old actor, Sheridan, Johnson growled out that it was time for him to resign his own. Somebody kindly repeated the remark to Sheridan, who would never afterwards speak to Johnson.

The pension, though very welcome to Johnson, who seems to have been in real distress at the time, suggested some difficulty. Johnson had unluckily spoken of a pension in his *Dictionary* as "generally understood to mean pay given to a State hireling for treason to his country." He was assured, however, that he did not

come within the definition; and that the reward was given for what he had done, not for anything he was expected to do. After some hesitation, Johnson consented to accept the payment thus offered without the direct suggestion of any obligation, though it was probably calculated that he would in case of need, be the more ready, as actually happened, to use his pen in defence of authority. He had not compromised his independence and might fairly laugh at angry comments. "I wish," he said afterwards, "that my pension were twice as large, that they might make twice as much noise." "I cannot now curse the House of Hanover," was his phrase on another occasion; "but I think that the pleasure of cursing the House of Hanover and drinking King James's health, all amply overbalanced by three hundred pounds a year." In truth, his Jacobitism was by this time, whatever it had once been, nothing more than a humorous crotchet, giving opportunity for the expression of Tory prejudice.

"I hope you will now purge and live cleanly like a gentleman," was Beauclerk's comment upon hearing of his friend's accession of fortune, and as Johnson is now emerging from Grub Street, it is desirable to consider what manner of man was to be presented to the wider circles that were opening to receive him.

CHAPTER III.

JOHNSON AND HIS FRIENDS.

It is not till some time after Johnson had come into the enjoyment of his pension, that we first see him through the eyes of competent observers. The Johnson of our knowledge, the most familiar figure to all students of English literary history had already long passed the prime of life, and done the greatest part of his literary work. His character, in the common phrase, had been "formed" years before; as, indeed, people's characters are chiefly formed in the cradle; and, not only his character, but the habits which are learnt in the great schoolroom of the world were fixed beyond any possibility of change. The strange eccentricities which had now become a second nature, amazed the society in which he was for over twenty years a prominent figure. Unsympathetic observers, those especially to whom the Chesterfield type represented the ideal of humanity, were simply disgusted or repelled. The man, they thought, might be in his place at a Grub Street pot-house; but had no business in a lady's drawing-room. If he had been modest and retiring, they might have put up with his defects; but Johnson was not a person whose qualities, good or bad, were of a kind to be ignored. Naturally enough, the fashionable world cared little for the rugged old giant. "The great," said Johnson, "had tried him and given him up; they had seen enough of him;" and his reason was pretty much to the purpose. "Great lords and great ladies don't love to have their mouths stopped," especially not, one may add, by an unwashed fist.

It is easy to blame them now. Everybody can see that a saint in beggar's rags is intrinsically better than a sinner in gold lace. But the principle is one of those which serves us for judging the dead, much more than for regulating our own conduct. Those, at any rate, may throw the first stone at the Horace Walpoles and Chesterfields, who are quite certain that they would ask a modern Johnson to their houses. The trial would be severe. Poor Mrs. Boswell complained grievously of her husband's idolatry. "I have seen many a bear led by a man," she said; "but I never before saw a man led by a bear." The truth is, as Boswell explains, that the sage's uncouth habits, such as turning the candles' heads downwards to make them burn more brightly, and letting the wax drop upon the carpet, "could not but be disagreeable to a lady."

He had other habits still more annoying to people of delicate perceptions. A hearty despiser of all affectations, he despised especially the affectation of indifference to the pleasures of the table. "For my part," he said, "I mind my belly very studiously and very carefully, for I look upon it that he who does not mind his belly will hardly mind anything else." Avowing this principle he would innocently give himself the airs of a scientific epicure. "I, madam," he said to the terror of a lady with whom he was about to sup, "who live at a variety of good tables, am a much better judge of cookery than any person who has a very tolerable cook, but lives much at home, for his palate is gradually adapted to the taste of his cook, whereas, madam, in trying by a wider range, I can more exquisitely judge." But his pretensions to exquisite taste are by no means borne out by independent witnesses. "He laughs," said Tom Davies, "like a rhinoceros," and he seems to have eaten like a wolf—savagely, silently, and with undiscriminating fury. He was not a pleasant object during this performance. He was totally absorbed in the business of the moment, strong perspiration came out, and the veins of his forehead swelled. He liked coarse satisfying dishes—boiled pork and veal-pie stuffed with plums and sugar; and in regard to wine, he seems to have accepted the doctrines of the critic of a certain fluid professing to be port, who asked, "What more can you want? It is black, and it is thick, and it makes you drunk." Claret, as Johnson put it, "is the liquor for boys, and port for men; but he who aspires to be a hero must drink brandy." He could, however, refrain, though he could not be moderate, and for all the latter part of his life, from 1766, he was a total abstainer. Nor, it should be added, does he ever appear to have sought for more than exhilaration from wine. His earliest intimate friend, Hector, said that he had never but once seen him drunk.

His appetite for more innocent kinds of food was equally excessive. He would eat seven or eight peaches before break fast, and declared that he had only once in his life had as much wall-fruit as he wished. His consumption of tea was prodigious, beyond all precedent. Hawkins quotes Bishop Burnet as having drunk sixteen large cups every morning, a feat which would entitle him to be reckoned as a rival. "A hardened and shameless tea-drinker," Johnson called himself, who "with tea amuses the evenings, with tea solaces the midnights, and with tea welcomes the mornings." One of his teapots, preserved by a relic-hunter, contained two quarts, and he professed to have consumed five and twenty cups at a sitting. Poor Mrs. Thrale complains that he often kept her up making tea for him till four in the morning. His reluctance to go to bed was due to the fact that his nights were periods of intense misery; but the vast potations of tea can scarcely have tended to improve them.

The huge frame was clad in the raggedest of garments, until his acquaintance with the Thrales led to a partial reform. His wigs were generally burnt in front, from his shortsighted knack of

reading with his head close to the candle; and at the Thrales, the butler stood ready to effect a change of wigs as he passed into the dining-room. Once or twice we have accounts of his bursting into unusual splendour. He appeared at the first representation of *Irene* in a scarlet waistcoat laced with gold; and on one of his first interviews with Goldsmith he took the trouble to array himself decently, because Goldsmith was reported to have justified slovenly habits by the precedent of the leader of his craft. Goldsmith, judging by certain famous suits, seems to have profited by the hint more than his preceptor. As a rule, Johnson's appearance, before he became a pensioner, was worthy of the proverbial manner of Grub Street. Beauclerk used to describe how he had once taken a French lady of distinction to see Johnson in his chambers. On descending the staircase they heard a noise like thunder. Johnson was pursuing them, struck by a sudden sense of the demands upon his gallantry. He brushed in between Beauclerk and the lady, and seizing her hand conducted her to her coach. A crowd of people collected to stare at the sage, dressed in rusty brown, with a pair of old shoes for slippers, a shrivelled wig on the top of his head, and with shirtsleeves and the knees of his breeches hanging loose. In those days, clergymen and physicians were only just abandoning the use of their official costume in the streets, and Johnson's slovenly habits were even more marked than they would be at present. "I have no passion for clean linen," he once remarked, and it is to be feared that he must sometimes have offended more senses than one.

In spite of his uncouth habits of dress and manners, Johnson claimed, and in a sense, with justice, to be a polite man. "I look upon myself," he said once to Boswell "as a very polite man." He could show the stately courtesy of a sound Tory, who cordially accepts the principle of social distinction, but has far too strong a sense of self-respect to fancy that compliance with the ordinary conventions can possibly lower his own position. Rank of the spiritual kind was especially venerable to him. "I should as soon have thought of contradicting a bishop," was a phrase which marked the highest conceivable degree of deference to a man whom he respected. Nobody, again, could pay more effective compliments, when he pleased; and the many female friends who have written of him who agree, that he could be singularly attractive to women. Women are, perhaps, more inclined than men to forgive external roughness in consideration of the great charm of deep tenderness in a thoroughly masculine nature. A characteristic phrase was his remark to Miss Monckton. She had declared, in opposition to one of Johnson's prejudices, that Sterne's writings were pathetic: "I am sure," she said, "they have affected me." "Why," said Johnson, smiling and rolling himself about, "that is because, dearest, you are a dunce!" When she mentioned this to him some time afterwards he replied: "Madam, if I had thought so, I certainly should not have said it." The truth could not be more neatly put.

Boswell notes, with some surprise, that when Johnson dined

with Lord Monboddo he insisted upon rising when the ladies left the table, and took occasion to observe that politeness was "fictitious benevolence," and equally useful in common intercourse. Boswell's surprise seems to indicate that Scotchmen in those days were even greater bears than Johnson. He always insisted, as Miss Reynolds tells us, upon showing ladies to their carriages through Bolt Court, though his dress was such that her readers would, she thinks, be astonished that any man in his senses should have shown himself in it abroad or even at home. Another odd indication of Johnson's regard for good manners, so far as his lights would take him, was the extreme disgust with which he often referred to a certain footman in Paris, who used his fingers in place of sugar-tongs. So far as Johnson could recognise bad manners he was polite enough, though unluckily the limitation is one of considerable importance.

Johnson's claim to politeness were sometimes, it is true, put in a rather startling form. "Every man of any education," he once said to the amazement of his hearers, "would rather be called a rascal than accused of deficiency in the graces." Gibbon, who was present, slily inquired of a lady whether among all her acquaintance she could not find *one* exception. According to Mrs. Thrale, he went even further. Dr. Barnard, he said, was the only man who had ever done justice to his good breeding; "and you may observe," he added, "that I am well-bred to a degree of needless scrupulosity." He proceeded, according to Mrs Thrale, but the report a little taxes our faith, to claim the virtues not only of respecting ceremony, but of never contradicting or interrupting his hearers. It is rather odd that Dr. Barnard had once a sharp altercation with Johnson, and avenged himself by a sarcastic copy of verses in which, after professing to learn perfectness from different friends, he says,—

> Johnson shall teach me how to place,
> In varied light, each borrow'd grace;
> From him I'll learn to write;
> Copy his clear familiar style,
> And by the roughness of his file,
> Grow, like himself, polite.

Johnson, on this as on many occasions, repented of the blow as soon as it was struck, and sat down by Barnard, "literally smoothing down his arms and knees," and beseeching pardon. Barnard accepted his apologies, but went home and wrote his little copy of verses.

Johnson's shortcomings in civility were no doubt due, in part, to the narrowness of his faculties of perception. He did not know, for he could not see, that his uncouth gestures and slovenly dress were offensive; and he was not so well able to observe others as to shake off the manners contracted in Grub Street. It is hard to study a manual of etiquette late in life, and for a man of Johnson's imper-

fect faculties it was probably impossible. Errors of this kind were always pardonable, and are now simply ludicrous. But Johnson often shocked his companions by more indefensible conduct. He was irascible, overbearing, and, when angry, vehement beyond all propriety. He was "a tremendous companion," said Garrick's brother; and men of gentle nature, like Charles Fox, often shrank from his company, and perhaps exaggerated his brutality.

Johnson, who had long regarded conversation as the chief amusement, came in later years to regard it as almost the chief employment of life; and he had studied the art with the zeal of a man pursuing a favourite hobby. He had always, as he told Sir Joshua Reynolds, made it a principle to talk on all occasions as well as he could. He had thus obtained a mastery over his weapons which made him one of the most accomplished of conversational gladiators. He had one advantage which has pretty well disappeared from modern society, and the disappearance of which has been destructive to excellence of talk. A good talker, even more than a good orator, implies a good audience. Modern society is too vast and too restless to give a conversationalist a fair chance. For the formation of real proficiency in the art, friends should meet often, sit long, and be thoroughly at ease. A modern audience generally breaks up before it is well warmed through, and includes enough strangers to break the magic circle of social electricity. The clubs in which Johnson delighted were excellently adapted to foster his peculiar talent. There a man could "fold his legs and have his talk out"—a pleasure hardly to be enjoyed now. And there a set of friends meeting regularly, and meeting to talk, learnt to sharpen each other's skill in all dialectic manœuvres. Conversation may be pleasantest, as Johnson admitted, when two friends meet quietly to exchange their minds without any thought of display. But conversation considered as a game, as a bout of intellectual sword-play, has also charms which Johnson intensely appreciated. His talk was not of the encyclopædia variety, like that of some more modern celebrities; but it was full of apposite illustrations and unrivalled in keen argument, rapid flashes of wit and humour, scornful retort and dexterous sophistry. Sometimes he would fell his adversary at a blow; his sword, as Boswell said, would be through your body in an instant without preliminary flourishes; and in the excitement of talking for victory, he would use any device that came to hand. "There is no arguing with Johnson," said Goldsmith, quoting a phrase from Cibber, "for if his pistol misses fire, he knocks you down with the butt-end of it."

Johnson's view of conversation is indicated by his remark about Burke. "That fellow," he said at a time of illness, "calls forth all my powers. Were I to see Burke now, it would kill me." "It is when you come close to a man in conversation," he said on another occasion, "that you discover what his real abilities are. To make a speech in an assembly is a knack. Now I honour Thurlow, sir; Thurlow is a fine fellow, he fairly puts his mind to yours."

Johnson's retorts were fair play under the conditions of the

game, as it is fair play to kick an opponent's shins at football. But of course a man who had, as it were, become the acknowledged champion of the ring, and who had an irascible and thoroughly dogmatic temper, was tempted to become unduly imperious. In the company of which Savage was a distinguished member, one may guess that the conversational fervour sometimes degenerated into horse-play. Want of arguments would be supplied by personality, and the champion would avenge himself by brutality on an opponent who happened for once to be getting the best of him. Johnson, as he grew older and got into more polished society, became milder in his manners; but he had enough of the old spirit left in him to break forth at times with ungovernable fury, and astonish the well-regulated minds of respectable ladies and gentlemen.

Anecdotes illustrative of this ferocity abound, and his best friends—except, perhaps, Reynolds and Burke—had all to suffer in turn. On one occasion, when he had made a rude speech even to Reynolds, Boswell states, though with some hesitation, his belief that Johnson actually blushed. The records of his contests in this kind fill a large space in Boswell's pages. That they did not lead to worse consequences shows his absence of rancour. He was always ready and anxious for a reconciliation, though he would not press for one if his first overtures were rejected. There was no venom in the wounds he inflicted, for there was no ill-nature; he was rough in the heat of the struggle, and in such cases careless in distributing blows; but he never enjoyed giving pain. None of his tiffs ripened into permanent quarrels, and he seems scarcely to have lost a friend. He is a pleasant contrast in this, as in much else, to Horace Walpole, who succeeded, in the course of a long life, in breaking with almost all his old friends. No man set a higher value upon friendship than Johnson. "A man," he said to Reynolds, "ought to keep his friendship in constant repair;" or he would find himself left alone as he grew older. "I look upon a day as lost," he said later in life, "in which I do not make a new acquaintance." Making new acquaintances did not involve dropping the old. The list of his friends is a long one, and includes, as it were, successive layers, superposed upon each other, from the earliest period of his life.

This is so marked a feature in Johnson's character, that it will be as well at this point to notice some of the friendships from which he derived the greatest part of his happiness. Two of his schoolfellows, Hector and Taylor, remained his intimates through life. Hector survived to give information to Boswell, and Taylor, then a prebendary of Westminster, read the funeral service over his old friend in the Abbey. He showed, said some of the bystanders, too little feeling. The relation between the two men was not one of special tenderness; indeed they were so little congenial that Boswell rather gratuitously suspected his venerable teacher of having an eye to Taylor's will. It seems fairer to regard the acquaintance as an illustration of that curious adhesiveness which made Johnson cling to less attractive persons. At any rate, he did not

show the complacence of the proper will-hunter. Taylor was rector of Bosworth and squire of Ashbourne He was a fine specimen of the squire-parson; a justice of the peace, a warm politician, and what was worse, a warm Whig. He raised gigantic bulls, bragged of selling cows for 120 guineas and more, and kept a noble butler in purple clothes and a large white wig. Johnson respected Taylor as a sensible man, but was ready to have a round with him on occasion. He snorted contempt when Taylor talked of breaking some small vessels if he took an emetic. "Bah," said the doctor, who regarded a valetudinarian as a "scoundrel," "if you have so many things that will break, you had better break your neck at once, and there's an end on't." Nay, if he did not condemn Taylor's cows, he criticised his bulldog with cruel acuteness. "No, sir, he is not well-shaped; for there is not the quick transition from the thickness of the fore-part to the *tenuity*—the thin part—behind, which a bulldog ought to have." On the more serious topic of politics his Jacobite fulminations roused Taylor "to a pitch of bellowing." Johnson roared out that if the people of England were fairly polled (this was in 1777) the present king would be sent away to-night, and his adherents hanged to-morrow. Johnson, however, rendered Taylor the substantial service of writing sermons for him, two volumes of which were published after they were both dead; and Taylor must have been a bold man, if it be true, as has been said, that he refused to preach a sermon written by Johnson upon Mrs. Johnson's death, on the ground that it spoke too favourably of the character of the deceased.

Johnson paid frequent visits to Lichfield, to keep up his old friends. One of them was Lucy Porter, his wife's daughter, with whom, according to Miss Seward, he had been in love before he married her mother. He was at least tenderly attached to her through life. And, for the most part, the good people of Lichfield seem to have been proud of their fellow-townsman, and gave him a substantial proof of their sympathy by continuing to him, on favourable terms, the lease of a house originally granted to his father. There was, indeed, one remarkable exception in Miss Seward, who belonged to a genus specially contemptible to the old doctor. She was one of the fine ladies who dabbled in poetry, and aimed at being the centre of a small literary circle at Lichfield. Her letters are amongst the most amusing illustrations of the petty affectations and squabbles characteristic of such a provincial clique. She evidently hated Johnson at the bottom of her small soul; and, indeed, though Johnson once paid her a preposterous compliment—a weakness of which this stern moralist was apt to be guilty in the company of ladies—he no doubt trod pretty roughly upon some of her pet vanities.

By far the most celebrated of Johnson's Lichfield friends was David Garrick, in regard to whom his relations were somewhat peculiar. Reynolds said that Johnson considered Garrick to be his own property, and would never allow him to be praised or blamed by any one else without contradiction. Reynolds composed a pair

of imaginary dialogues to illustrate the proposition, in one of which Johnson attacks Garrick in answer to Reynolds, and in the other defends him in answer to Gibbon. The dialogues seem to be very good reproductions of the Johnsonian manner, though perhaps the courteous Reynolds was a little too much impressed by its roughness; and they probably include many genuine remarks of Johnson's. It is remarkable that the praise is far more pointed and elaborate than the blame, which turns chiefly upon the general inferiority of an actor's position. And, in fact, this seems to have corresponded to Johnson's opinion about Garrick as gathered from Boswell.

The two men had at bottom a considerable regard for each other, founded upon old association, mutual services, and reciprocal respect for talents of very different orders. But they were so widely separated by circumstances, as well as by a radical opposition of temperament, that any close intimacy could hardly be expected. The bear and the monkey are not likely to be intimate friends. Garrick's rapid elevation in fame and fortune seems to have produced a certain degree of envy in his old schoolmaster. A grave moral philosopher has, of course, no right to look askance at the rewards which fashion lavishes upon men of lighter and less lasting merit, and which he professes to despise. Johnson, however, was troubled with a rather excessive allowance of human nature. Moreover he had the good old-fashioned contempt for players, characteristic both of the Tory and the inartistic mind. He asserted roundly that he looked upon players as no better than dancing-dogs. "But, sir, you will allow that some players are better than others?" "Yes, sir, as some dogs dance better than others." So when Goldsmith accused Garrick of grossly flattering the queen, Johnson exclaimed, "And as to meanness—how is it mean in a player, a showman, a fellow who exhibits himself for a shilling, to flatter his queen?" At another time Boswell suggested that we might respect a great player. "What! sir," exclaimed Johnson, "a fellow who claps a hump upon his back and a lump on his leg and cries, '*I am Richard III.*'? Nay, sir, a ballad-singer is is a higher man, for he does two things: he repeats and he sings; there is both recitation and music in his performance—the player only recites."

Such sentiments were not very likely to remain unknown to Garrick nor to put him at ease with Johnson, whom, indeed, he always suspected of laughing at him. They had a little tiff on account of Johnson's Edition of Shakspeare. From some misunderstanding, Johnson did not make use of Garrick's collection of old plays. Johnson, it seems, thought that Garrick should have courted him more, and perhaps sent the plays to his house; whereas Garrick, knowing that Johnson treated books with a roughness ill-suited to their constitution, thought that he had done quite enough by asking Johnson to come to his library. The revenge—if it was revenge—taken by Johnson was to say nothing of Garrick in his Preface, and to glance obliquely at his non-communication of his

rarities. He seems to have thought that it would be a lowering of Shakspeare to admit that his fame owed anything to Garrick's exertions.

Boswell innocently communicated to Garrick a criticism of Johnson's upon one of his poems—

I'd smile with the simple and feed with the poor.

"Let me smile with the wise, and feed with the rich," was Johnson's tolerably harmless remark. Garrick, however, did not like it, and when Boswell tried to console him by saying that Johnson gored everybody in turn, and added, "*fœnum habet in cornu.*" "Ay," said Garrick vehemently, "he has a whole mow of it."

The most unpleasant incident was when Garrick proposed rather too freely to be a member of the Club. Johnson said that the first duke in England had no right to use such language, and said, according to Mrs. Thrale, "If Garrick does apply, I'll black-ball him. Surely we ought to be able to sit in a society like ours—

'Unelbowed by a gamester, pimp, or player!'"

Nearly ten years afterwards, however, Johnson favoured his election, and when he died, declared that the Club should have a year's widowhood. No successor to Garrick was elected during that time.

Johnson sometimes ventured to criticise Garrick's acting, but here Garrick could take his full revenge. The purblind Johnson was not, we may imagine, much of a critic in such matters. Garrick reports him to have said of an actor at Lichfield, "There is a courtly vivacity about the fellow;" when, in fact, said Garrick, "he was the most vulgar ruffian that ever went upon boards."

In spite of such collisions of opinion and mutual criticism, Johnson seems to have spoken in the highest terms of Garrick's good qualities, and they had many pleasant meetings. Garrick takes a prominent part in two or three of the best conversations in Boswell, and seems to have put his interlocutors in specially good temper. Johnson declared him to be "the first man in the world for sprightly conversation." He said that Dryden had written much better prologues than any of Garrick's, but that Garrick had written more good prologues than Dryden. He declared that it was wonderful how little Garrick had been spoilt by all the flattery that he had received. No wonder if he was a little vain: "a man who is perpetually flattered in every mode that can be conceived: so many bellows have blown the fuel, that one wonders he is not by this time become a cinder!" "If all this had happened to me," he said on another occasion, "I should have had a couple of fellows with long poles walking before me, to knock down everybody that stood in the way. Consider, if all this had happened to Cibber and Quin, they'd have jumped over the moon. Yet Garrick speaks to us," smiling. He admitted at the same time that Garrick had

raised the profession of a player. He defended Garrick, too, against the common charge of avarice. Garrick, as he pointed out, had been brought up in a family whose study it was to make fourpence go as far as fourpence-halfpenny. Johnson remembered in early days drinking tea with Garrick when Peg Woffington made it, and made it, as Garrick grumbled, "as red as blood." But when Garrick became rich he became liberal. He had, so Johnson declared, given away more money than any man in England.

After Garrick's death, Johnson took occasion to say, in the *Lives of the Poets*, that the death "had eclipsed the gaiety of nations and diminished the public stock of harmless pleasures." Boswell ventured to criticise the observation rather spitefully. "Why *nations?* Did his gaiety extend further than his own nation?" "Why, sir," replied Johnson, "some imagination must be allowed. Besides, we may say *nations* if we allow the Scotch to be a nation, and to have gaiety—which they have not." On the whole, in spite of various drawbacks, Johnson's reported observations upon Garrick will appear to be discriminative, and yet, on the whole, strongly favourable to his character. Yet we are not quite surprised that Mrs. Garrick did not respond to a hint thrown out by Johnson, that he would be glad to write the life of his friend.

At Oxford, Johnson acquired the friendship of Dr. Adams, afterwards Master of Pembroke and author of a once well-known reply to Hume's argument upon miracles. He was an amiable man, and was proud to do the honours of the university to his old friend, when, in later years, Johnson revisited the much-loved scenes of his neglected youth. The warmth of Johnson's regard for old days is oddly illustrated by an interview recorded by Boswell with one Edwards, a fellow-student whom he met again in 1778, not having previously seen him since 1729. They had lived in London for forty years without once meeting, a fact more surprising then than now. Boswell eagerly gathered up the little scraps of college anecdote which the meeting produced, but perhaps his best find was a phrase of Edwards himself. "You are a philosopher, Dr. Johnson," he said; "I have tried, too, in my time to be a philosopher; but, I don't know how, cheerfulness was always breaking in." The phrase, as Boswell truly says, records an exquisite trait of character.

Of the friends who gathered round Johnson during his period of struggle, many had vanished before he became well known. The best loved of all seems to have been Dr. Bathurst, a physician, who, failing to obtain practice, joined the expedition to Havannah, and fell a victim to the climate (1762). Upon him Johnson pronounced a panegyric which has contributed a proverbial phrase to the language. "Dear Bathurst," he said, "was a man to my very heart's content: he hated a fool and he hated a rogue, and he hated a Whig; he was a *very good hater*." Johnson remembered Bathurst in his prayers for years after his loss, and received from him a peculiar legacy. Francis Barber had been the negro slave

of Bathurst's father, who left him his liberty by will. Dr. Bathurst allowed him to enter Johnson's service; and Johnson sent him to school at considerable expense, and afterwards retained him in his service with little interruption till his own death. Once Barber ran away to sea, and was discharged, oddly enough, by the good offices of Wilkes, to whom Smollett applied on Johnson's behalf. Barber became an important member of Johnson's family, some of whom reproached him for his liberality to the nigger. No one ever solved the great problem as to what services were rendered by Barber to his master, whose wig was "as impenetrable by a comb as a quickset hedge," and whose clothes were never touched by the brush.

Among the other friends of this period must be reckoned his biographer, Hawkins, an attorney who was afterwards Chairman of the Middlesex Justices, and knighted on presenting an address to the King. Boswell regarded poor Sir John Hawkins with all the animosity of a rival author, and with some spice of wounded vanity. He was grievously offended, so at least says Sir John's daughter, on being described in the *Life of Johnson* as "Mr. James Boswell" without a solitary epithet such as celebrated or well-known. If that was really his feeling, he had his revenge; for no one book ever so suppressed another as Boswell's Life suppressed Hawkins's. In truth, Hawkins was a solemn prig, remarkable chiefly for the unusual intensity of his conviction that all virtue consists in respectability. He had a special aversion to "goodness of heart," which he regarded as another name for a quality properly called extravagance or vice. Johnson's tenacity of old acquaintance introduced him into the Club, where he made himself so disagreeable, especially, as it seems, by rudeness to Burke, that he found it expedient to invent a pretext for resignation. Johnson called him a "very unclubable man," and may perhaps have intended him in the quaint description: "I really believe him to be an honest man at the bottom; though, to be sure, he is rather penurious, and he is somewhat mean; and it must be owned he has some degree of brutality, and is not without a tendency to savageness that cannot well be defended."

In a list of Johnson's friends it is proper to mention Richardson and Hawkesworth. Richardson seems to have given him substantial help, and was repaid by favourable comparisons with Fielding, scarcely borne out by the verdict of posterity. "Fielding," said Johnson, "could tell the hour by looking at the clock; whilst Richardson knew how the clock was made." "There is more knowledge of the heart," he said at another time, "in one letter of Richardson's than in all *Tom Jones*. Johnson's preference of the sentimentalist to the man whose humour and strong sense were so like his own, shows how much his criticism was biassed by his prejudices; though, of course, Richardson's external decency was a recommendation to the moralist. Hawkesworth's intimacy with Johnson seems to have been chiefly in the period between the *Dictionary* and the pension. He was consid-

ered to be Johnson's best imitator; and has vanished like other imitators. His fate, very doubtful if the story believed at the time be true, was a curious one for a friend of Johnson's. He had made some sceptical remarks as to the efficacy of prayer in his preface to the South Sea Voyages; and was so bitterly attacked by a "Christian" in the papers, that he destroyed himself by a dose of opium.

Two younger friends, who became disciples of the sage soon after the appearance of the *Rambler*, are prominent figures in the later circle. One of these was Bennet Langton, a man of good family, fine scholarship, and very amiable character. His exceedingly tall and slender figure was compared by Best to the stork in Raphael's cartoon of the Miraculous Draught of Fishes. Miss Hawkins describes him sitting with one leg twisted round the other as though to occupy the smallest possible space, and playing with his gold snuff-box with a mild countenance and sweet smile. The gentle, modest creature was loved by Johnson, who could warm into unusual eloquence in singing his praises. The doctor, however, was rather fond of discussing with Boswell the faults of his friend. They seem to have chiefly consisted in a certain languor or sluggishness of temperament which allowed his affairs to get into perplexity. Once, when arguing the delicate question as to the propriety of telling a friend of his wife's unfaithfulness, Boswell, after his peculiar fashion, chose to enliven the abstract statement by the purely imaginary hypothesis of Mr. and Mrs. Langton being in this position. Johnson said that it would be useless to tell Langton, because he would be too sluggish to get a divorce. Once Langton was the unconscious cause of one of Johnson's oldest performances. Langton had employed Chambers, a common friend of his and Johnson's, to draw his will. Johnson, talking to Chambers and Boswell, was suddenly struck by the absurdity of his friend's appearing in the character of testator. His companions, however, were utterly unable to see in what the joke consisted; but Johnson laughed obstreperously and irrepressibly: he laughed till he reached the Temple Gate; and when in Fleet Street went almost into convulsions of hilarity. Holding on by one of the posts in the street, he sent forth such peals of laughter that they seemed in the silence of the night to resound from Temple Bar to Fleet Ditch.

Not long before his death, Johnson applied to Langton for spiritual advice. "I desired him to tell me sincerely in what he thought my life was faulty." Langton wrote upon a sheet of paper certain texts recommending Christian charity; and explained, upon inquiry, that he was pointing at Johnson's habit of contradiction. The old doctor began by thanking him earnestly for his kindness: but gradually waxed savage and asked Langton, "in a loud and angry tone, What is your drift, sir?" He complained of the well-meant advice to Boswell, with a sense that he had been unjustly treated. It was a scene for a comedy, as Reynolds observed, to see a penitent get into a passion and belabour his confessor.

Through Langton, Johnson became acquainted with the friend whose manner was in the strongest contrast to his own. Topham Beauclerk was a man of fashion. He was commended to Johnson by a likeness to Charles II., from whom he was descended, being the grandson of the first Duke of St. Alban's. Beauclerk was a man of literary and scientific tastes. He inherited some of the moral laxity which Johnson chose to pardon in his ancestor. Some years after his acquaintance with Boswell he married Lady Diana Spencer, a lady who had been divorced upon his account from her husband, Lord Bolingbroke. But he took care not to obtrude his faults of life, whatever they may have been, upon the old moralist, who entertained for him a peculiar affection. He specially admired Beauclerk's skill in the use of a more polished, if less vigorous, style of conversation than his own. He envied the ease with which Beauclerk brought out his sly incisive retorts. "No man," he said, "ever was so free when he was going to say a good thing, from a look that expressed that it was coming; or, when he had said it, from a look that expressed that it had come." When Beauclerk was dying (in 1780), Johnson said, with a faltering voice, that he would walk to the extremity of the diameter of the earth to save him. Two little anecdotes are expressive of his tender feeling for this incongruous friend. Boswell had asked him to sup at Beauclerk's. He started, but, on the way, recollecting himself, said, "I cannot go; but *I do not love Beauclerk the less.*" Beauclerk had put upon a portrait of Johnson the inscription,—

Ingenium ingens
Inculto latet hoc sub corpore.

Langton, who bought the portrait, had the inscription removed. "It was kind in you to take it off," said Johnson; and, after a short pause, "not unkind in him to put it on."

Early in their acquaintance, the two young men, Beau and Lanky, as Johnson called them, had set up one night at a tavern till three in the morning. The courageous thought struck them that they would knock up the old philosopher. He came to the door of his chambers, poker in hand, with an old wig for a nightcap. On hearing their errand, the sage exclaimed, "What! is it you, you dogs? I'll have a frisk with you." And so Johnson with the two youths, his juniors by about thirty years, proceeded to make a night of it. They amazed the fruiterers in Covent Garden; they brewed a bowl of bishop in a tavern, while Johnson quoted the poet's address to Sleep,—

"Short, A short, be then thy reign,
And give us to the world again!"

They took a boat to Billingsgate, and Johnson, with Beauclerk, kept up their amusement for the following day, when Langton deserted them to go to breakfast with some young ladies, and Johnson scolded him for leaving his friends "to go and sit with a parcel

of wretched *unidea'd* girls." "I shall have my old friend to bail out of the round-house," said Garrick when he heard of this queer alliance; and he told Johnson that he would be in the *Chronicle* for his frolic. "He *durst* not do such a thing. His wife would not let him," was the moralist's retort.

Some friends, known to fame by other titles than their connexion with Johnson, had by this time gathered round them. Among them was one, whose art he was unable to appreciate, but whose fine social qualities and dignified equability of temper made him a valued and respected companion. Reynolds had settled in London at the end of 1752. Johnson met him at the house of Miss Cotterell. Reynolds had specially admired Johnson's *Life of Savage*, and, on their first meeting, happened to make a remark which delighted Johnson. The ladies were regretting the loss of a friend to whom they were under obligations. "You have, however," said Reynolds, "the comfort of being relieved from a burden of gratitude." The saying is a little too much like Rochefoucauld, and too true to be pleasant; but it was one of those keen remarks which Johnson appreciated because they prick a bubble of commonplace moralising without demanding too literal an acceptation. He went home to sup with Reynolds and became his intimate friend. On another occasion, Johnson was offended by two ladies of rank at the same house, and by way of taking down their pride, asked Reynolds in a loud voice, "How much do you think you and I could get in a week, if we both worked as hard as we could?" "His appearance," says Sir Joshua's sister, Miss Reynolds, "might suggest the poor author: as he was not likely in that place to be a blacksmith or a porter." Poor Miss Reynolds, who tells this story, was another attraction to Reynolds' house. She was a shy, retiring maiden lady, who vexed her famous brother by following in his steps without his talents, and was deeply hurt by his annoyance at the unintentional mockery. Johnson was through life a kind and judicious friend to her; and had attracted her on their first meeting by a significant indication of his character. He said that when going home to his lodgings at one or two in the morning, he often saw poor children asleep on thresholds and stalls—the wretched "street Arabs" of the day—and that he used to put pennies into their hands that they might buy a breakfast.

Two friends, who deserve to beplaced beside Reynolds, came from Ireland to seek their fortunes in London. Edmund Burke, incomparably the greatest writer upon political philosophy in English literature, the master of a style unrivalled for richness, flexibility, and vigour, was radically opposed to Johnson on party questions, though his language upon the French Revolution, after Johnson's death, would have satisfied even the strongest prejudices of his old friend. But he had qualities which commended him even to the man who called him a "bottomless Whig," and who generally spoke of Whigs as rascals, and maintained that the first Whig was the devil. If his intellect was wider, his heart was as warm as Johnson's, and in conversation he merited the generous ap-

plause and warm emulation of his friends. Johnson was never tired of praising the extraordinary readiness and spontaneity of Burke's conversation. "If a man," he said, "went under a shed at the same time with Burke to avoid a shower, he would say, 'This is an extraordinary man.' Or if Burke went into a stable to see his horse dressed, the ostler would say, 'We have had an extraordinary man here.'" When Burke was first going into Parliament, Johnson said in answer to Hawkins, who wondered that such a man should get a seat, "We who know Mr. Burke, know that he will be one of the first men in the country." Speaking of certain other members of Parliament, more after the heart of Sir John Hawkins, he said that he grudged success to a man who made a figure by a knowledge of a few forms, though his mind was "as narrow as the neck of a vinegar cruet;" but then he did not grudge Burke's being the first man in the House of Commons, for he would be the first man everywhere. And Burke equally admitted Johnson's supremacy in conversation. "It is enough for me," he said to some one who regretted Johnson's monopoly of the talk on a particular occasion, "to have rung the bell for him."

The other Irish adventurer, whose career was more nearly moulded upon that of Johnson, came to London in 1756, and made Johnson's acquaintance. Some time afterwards (in or before 1761) Goldsmith, like Johnson, had tasted the bitterness of an usher's life, and escaped into the scarcely more tolerable region of Grub Street. After some years of trial, he was becoming known to the booksellers as a serviceable hand, and had two works in his desk destined to lasting celebrity. His landlady (apparently 1764) one day arrested him for debt. Johnson, summoned to his assistance, sent him a guinea and speedily followed. The guinea had already been changed, and Goldsmith was consoling himself with a bottle of Maderia. Johnson corked the bottle, and a discussion of ways and means brought out the manuscript of the *Vicar of Wakefield*. Johnson looked into it, took it to a bookseller, got sixty pounds for it, and returned to Goldsmith, who paid his rent and administered a sound rating to his landlady.

The relation thus indicated is characteristic; Johnson was as a rough but helpful elder brother to poor Goldsmith, gave him advice, sympathy, and applause, and at times criticised him pretty sharply, or brought down his conversational bludgeon upon his sensitive friend. "He has nothing of the bear but his skin," was Goldsmith's comment upon his clumsy friend, and the two men appreciated each other at bottom. Some of their readers may be inclined to resent Johnson's attitude of superiority. The admirably pure and tender heart, and the exquisite intellectual refinement implied in the *Vicar* and the *Traveller*, force us to love Goldsmith in spite of superficial foibles, and when Johnson prunes or interpolates lines in the *Traveller*, we feel as though a woodman's axe was hacking at a most delicate piece of carving. The evidence of contemporary observers, however, must force impartial readers to admit that Goldsmith's foibles were real, however amply compensated by

rare and admirable qualities. Garrick's assertion, that he "wrote like an angel but talked like poor Poll," expresses the unanimous opinion of all who had actually seen him. Undoubtedly some of the stories of his childish vanity, his frankly expressed envy, and his general capacity for blundering, owe something to Boswell's feeling that he was a rival near the throne, and sometimes poor Goldsmith's humorous self-assertion may have been taken too seriously by blunt English wits. One may doubt, for example, whether he was really jealous of a puppet tossing a pike, and unconscious of his absurdity in saying "Pshaw! I could do it better myself!" Boswell, however, was too good an observer to misrepresent at random, and he has, in fact, explained very well the true meaning of his remarks. Goldsmith was an excitable Irishman of genius, who tumbled out whatever came uppermost, and revealed the feelings of the moment with an utter want of reserve. His self-controlled companions wondered, ridiculed, misinterpreted, and made fewer hits as well as fewer misses. His anxiety "to get in and shine," made him, according to Johnson, an "unsocial" companion. "Goldsmith," he said, "had not temper enough for the game he played. He staked too much. A man might always get a fall from his inferior in the chances of talk, and Goldsmith felt his wounds too keenly." He had certainly some trials of temper in Johnson's company. "Stay, stay," said a German, stopping him in the full flow of his eloquence, "Toctor Johnson is going to say something." An Eton Master called Graham, who was supping with the two doctors, and had got to the pitch of looking at one person, and talking to another, said, "Doctor, I shall be glad to see *you* at Eton." "I shall be glad to wait on you," said Goldsmith. "No," replied Graham, "'tis not you I mean, Doctor Minor; 'tis Doctor Major there." Poor Goldsmith said afterwards, "Graham is a fellow to make one commit suicide."

Boswell who attributes some of Goldsmith's sayings about Johnson to envy, said with probable truth that Goldsmith had not more envy than others, but only spoke of it more freely. Johnson argued that we must be angry with a man who had so much of an odious quality that he could not keep it to himself, but let it "boil over." The feeling, at any rate, was momentary and totally free from malice; and Goldsmith's criticisms upon Johnson and his idolators seem to have been fair enough. His objection to Boswell's substituting a monarchy for a republic has already been mentioned. At another time he checked Boswell's flow of panegyric by asking, "Is he like Burke, who winds into a subject like a serpent?" To which Boswell replied with charming irrelevance, "Johnson is the Hercules who strangled serpents in his cradle." The last of Goldsmith's hits was suggested by Johnson's shaking his sides with laughter because Goldsmith admired the skill with which the little fishes in the fable were made to talk in character. "Why, Dr. Johnson, this is not so easy as you seem to think," was the retort, "for if you were to make little fishes talk, they would talk like whales."

In spite of sundry little sparrings, Johnson fully appreciated Goldsmith's genius. Possibly his authority hastened the spread of public appreciation, as he seemed to claim, whilst repudiating Boswell's too flattering theory that it had materially raised Goldsmith's position. When Reynolds quoted the authority of Fox in favour of the *Traveller*, saying that his friends might suspect that they had been too partial, Johnson replied very truly that the *Traveller* was beyond the need of Fox's praise, and that the partiality of Goldsmith's friends had always been against him. They would hardly give him a hearing. "Goldsmith," he added, "was a man who, whatever he wrote, always did it better than any other man could do." Johnson's settled opinion in fact was that embodied in the famous epitaph with its "nihil tetigit quod non ornavit," and, though dedications are perhaps the only literary product more generally insincere than epitaphs, we may believe that Goldsmith too meant what he said in the dedication of *She Stoops to Conquer*. "It may do me some honour to inform the public that I have lived many years in intimacy with you. It may serve the interests of mankind also to inform them that the greatest wit may be found in a character, without impairing the most unaffected piety."

Though Johnson was thus rich in friendship, two connexions have still to be noticed which had an exceptional bearing upon his fame and happiness. In January, 1765, he made the acquaintance of the Thrales. Mr. Thrale was the proprietor of the brewery which afterwards became that of Barclay and Perkins. He was married in 1763 to a Miss Hester Lynch Salisbury, who has become celebrated from her friendship with Johnson.* She was a woman of great vivacity and independence of character. She had a sensitive and passionate, if not a very tender nature, and enough literary culture to appreciate Johnson's intellectual power, and on occasion to play a very respectable part in conversation. She had far more Latin and English scholarship than fell to the lot of most ladies of her day, and wit enough to preserve her from degenerating like some of the "blues," into that most offensive of beings—a feminine prig. Her marriage had been one of convenience, and her husband's want of sympathy, and jealousy of any interference in business matters, forced her, she says, to take to literature as her sole resource. "No wonder," she adds, "if I loved my books and children." It is, perhaps, more to be wondered at that her children seem to have had a rather subordinate place in her affections. The marriage, however, though not of the happiest, was perfectly decorous. Mrs. Thrale discharged her domestic duties irreproachably, even when she seems to have had some real cause of complaint. To the world she eclipsed her husband, a solid respectable man, whose mind, according to Johnson, struck the hours very regularly, though it did not mark the minutes.

The Thrales were introduced to Johnson by their common friend, Arthur Murphy, an actor and dramatist, who afterwards be-

* Mrs. Thrale was born in 1740 or 1741, probably the latter. Thrale was born in 1724.

came the editor of Johnson's works. One day, when calling upon Johnson, they found him in such a fit of despair that Thrale tried to stop his mouth by placing his hand before it. The pair then joined in begging Johnson to leave his solitary abode, and come to them at their country-house at Streatham. He complied, and for the next sixteen years a room was set apart for him, both at Streatham and in their house in Southwark. He passed a large part of his time with them, and derived from the intimacy most of the comfort of his later years. He treated Mrs. Thrale with a kind of paternal gallantry, her age at the time of their acquaintance being twenty-four, and his fifty-five. He generally called her by the playful name of "my mistress," addressed little poems to her, gave her solid advice, and gradually came to confide to her his miseries and ailments with rather surprising frankness. She flattered and amused him, and soothed his sufferings and did something towards humanising his rugged exterior. There was one little grievance between them which requires notice. Johnson's pet virtue in private life was a rigid regard for truth. He spoke, it was said of him, as if he was always on oath. He would not, for example, allow his servant to use the phrase "not at home," and even in the heat of conversation resisted the temptation to give point to an anecdote. The lively Mrs. Thrale rather fretted against the restraint, and Johnson admonished her in vain. He complained to Boswell that she was willing to have that said of her, which the best of mankind had rather died than have said of them. Boswell, the faithful imitator of his master in this respect, delighted in taking up the parable. "Now, madam, give me leave to catch you in the fact," he said on one occasion; "it was not an old woman, but an old man whom I mentioned, as having told me this," and he recounts his check to the "lively lady" with intense complacency. As may be imagined, Boswell and Mrs. Thrale did not love each other, in spite of the well-meant efforts of the sage to bring about a friendly feeling between his disciples.

It is time to close this list of friends with the inimitable Boswell. James Boswell, born in 1740, was the eldest son of a Whig laird and lord of sessions. He had acquired some English friends at the Scotch universities, among whom must be mentioned Mr. Temple, an English clergyman. Boswell's correspondence with Temple, discovered years after his death by a singular chance, and published in 1857, is, after the Life of Johnson, one of the most curious exhibitions of character in the language. Boswell was intended for the Scotch bar, and studied civil law at Utrecht in the winter of 1762. It was in the following summer that he made Johnson's acquaintance.

Perhaps the fundamental quality in Boswell's character was his intense capacity for enjoyment. He was, as Mr. Carlyle puts it, "gluttonously fond of whatever would yield him a little solacement, were it only of a stomachic character." His love of good living and good drink would have made him a hearty admirer of his countryman, Burns, had Burns been famous in Boswell's youth. Nobody

could have joined with more thorough abandonment in the chorus to the poet's liveliest songs in praise of love and wine. He would have made an excellent fourth when "Willie brewed a peck of malt, and Rab and Allan came to see," and the drinking contest for the Whistle commemorated in another lyric would have excited his keenest interest. He was always delighted when he could get Johnson to discuss the ethics and statistics of drinking. "I am myself," he says, "a lover of wine, therefore curious to hear whatever is remarkable concerning drinking." The remark is *à propos* to a story of Dr. Campbell drinking thirteen bottles of port at a sitting. Lest this should seem incredible, he quotes Johnson's dictum. "Sir, if a man drinks very slowly and lets one glass evaporate before he takes another, I know not how long he may drink." Boswell's faculty for making love was as great as his power of drinking. His letters to Temple record with amusing frankness the vicissitudes of some of his courtships and the versatility of his pass ons.

Boswell's tastes, however, were by no means limited to sensual or frivolous enjoyments. His appreciation of the bottle was combined with an equally hearty sensibility to more intellectual pleasures. He had not a spark of philosophic or poetic power, but within the ordinary range of such topics as can be discussed at a dinner-party, he had an abundant share of liveliness and intelligence. His palate was as keen for good talk as for good wine. He was an admirable recipient, if not an originator, of shrewd or humorous remarks upon life and manners. What in regard to sensual enjoyment was mere gluttony, appeared in higher matters as an insatiable curiosity. At times this faculty became intolerable to his neighbors. "I will not be baited with what and why," said poor Johnson, one day in desperation. "Why is a cow's tail long? Why is a fox's tail bushy?" "Sir," said Johnson on another occasion, when Boswell was cross-examining a third person about him in his presence. "You have but two subjects, yourself and me. I am sick of both." Boswell, however, was not to be repelled by such a retort as this, or even by ruder rebuffs. Once when discussing the means of getting a friend to leave London, Johnson said in revenge for a previous offence. "Nay, sir, we'll send you to him. If your presence doesn't drive a man out of his house, nothing will." Boswell was "horribly shocked," but he still stuck to his victim like a leech, and pried into the minutest details of his life and manners. He observed with conscientious accuracy that though Johnson abstained from milk one fast-day, he did not reject it when put in his cup. He notes the whistlings and puffings, the trick of saying "too-too-too" of his idol: and it was a proud day when he won a bet by venturing to ask Johnson what he did with certain scraped bits of orange-peel. His curiosity was not satisfied on this occasion; but it would have made him the prince of interviewers in these days. Nothing delighted him so much as rubbing shoulders with any famous or notorious person. He scraped acquaintance with Voltaire, Wesley, Rousseau, and Paoli, as well as

with Mrs. Rudd, a forgotten heroine of the *Newgate Calendar* He was as eager to talk to Hume the sceptic, or Wilkes the demagogue, as to the orthodox Tory, Johnson; and, if repelled, it was from no deficiency in daring. In 1767, he took advantage of his travels in Corsica to introduce himself to Lord Chatham, then Prime Minister. The letter moderately ends by asking, "*Could your lordship find time to honour me now and then with a letter?* I have been told how favourably your lordship has spoken of me. To correspond with a Paoli and with a Chatham is enough to keep a young man ever ardent in the pursuit of virtuous fame." No other young man of the day, we may be sure, would have dared to make such a proposal to the majestic orator.

His absurd vanity, and the greedy craving for notoriety at any cost, would have made Boswell the most offensive of mortals, had not his unfeigned good-humour disarmed enmity. Nobody could help laughing, or be inclined to take offence at his harmless absurdities. Burke said of him that he had so much good-humour naturally, that it was scarcely a virtue. His vanity, in fact, did not generate affectation. Most vain men are vain of qualities which they do not really possess, or possess in a lower degree than they fancy. They are always acting a part, and become touchy from a half-conscious sense of the imposture. But Boswell seems to have had few such illusions. He thoroughly and unfeignedly enjoyed his own peculiarities, and thought his real self much too charming an object to be in need of any disguise. No man, therefore, was ever less embarrassed by any regard for his own dignity. He was as ready to join in a laugh at himself as in a laugh at his neighbours. He reveals his own absurdities to the world at large as frankly as Pepys confided them to a journal in cypher. He tells us how drunk he got one night in Skye, and how he cured his headache with brandy next morning; and what an intolerable fool he made of himself at an evening party in London after a dinner with the Duke of Montrose, and how Johnson in vain did his best to keep him quiet. His motive for the concession is partly the wish to illustrate Johnson's indulgence, and, in the last case, to introduce a copy of apologetic verses to the lady whose guest he had been. He reveals other weaknesses with equal frankness. One day, he says, "I owned to Johnson that I was occasionally troubled with a fit of narrowness." "Why, sir," said he, "so am I. *But I do not tell it.*" Boswell enjoys the joke far too heartily to act upon th advice.

There is nothing, however, which Boswell seems to have enjoyed more heartily than his own good impulses. He looks upon his virtuous resolution with a sort of æsthetic satisfaction, and with the glow of a virtuous man contemplating a promising penitent. Whilst suffering severely from the consequences of imprudent conduct, he gets a letter of virtuous advice from his friend Temple. He instantly sees himself reformed for the rest of his days. "My warm imagination," he says, "looks forward with great complacency on the sobriety, the healthfulness, and worth of my future

life." "Every instance of our doing those things which we ought not to have done, and leaving undone those things which we ought to have done, is attended," as he elsewhere sagely observes, "with more or less of what is truly remorse;" but he seems rather to have enjoyed even the remorse. It is needless to say that the complacency was its own reward, and that the resolution vanished like other more eccentric impulses. Music, he once told Johnson, affected him intensely, producing in his mind "alternate sensations of pathetic dejection, so that I was ready to shed tears, and of daring resolution so that I was inclined to rush into the thickest of the [purely hypothetical] battle." "Sir," replied Johnson, "I should never hear it, if it made me such a fool." Elsewhere he expresses a wish to "fly to the woods," or retire into a desert, a disposition which Johnson checked by one of his habitual gibes at the quantity of easily accessible desert in Scotland. Boswell is equally frank in describing himself in situations more provocative of contempt than even drunkenness in a drawing-room. He tells us how dreadfully frightened he was by a storm at sea in the Hebrides, and how one of his companions, "with a happy readiness," made him lay hold of a rope fastened to the masthead, and told him to pull it when he was ordered. Boswell was thus kept quiet in mind and harmless in body.

This extreme simplicity of character makes poor Boswell lovable in his way. If he sought notoriety, he did not so far mistake his powers as to set up for independent notoriety.* He was content to shine in reflected light: and the affectations with which he is charged seem to have been unconscious imitations of his great idol. Miss Burney traced some likeness even in his dress. In the latter part of the *Life* we meet phrases in which Boswell is evidently aping the true Johnsonian style. So, for example, when somebody distinguishes between "moral" and "physical necessity;" Boswell exclaims, "Alas, sir, they come both to the same thing. You may be as hard bound by chains when covered by leather, as when the iron appears." But he specially emulates the profound melancholy of his hero. He seems to have taken pride in his sufferings from hypochondria; though, in truth, his melancholy diverges from Johnson's by as great a difference as that which divides any two varieties in Jaques's classifications. Boswell's was the melancholy of a man who spends too much, drinks too much, falls in love too often, and is forced to live in the country in dependence upon a stern old parent, when he is longing for a jovial life in London taverns. Still he was excusably vexed when Johnson refused to believe in the reality of his complaints, and showed scant sympathy to his noisy would-be fellow-sufferer. Some of Boswell's freaks were, in fact, very trying. Once he gave up writing letters for a long time, to see whether Johnson would be induced to write first. Johnson be-

* The story is often told how Boswell appeared at the Stratford Jubilee with "Corsica Boswell" in large letters on his hat. The account given apparently by himself is sufficiently amusing, but the statement is not quite fair. Boswell not unnaturally appeared at a masquerade in the dress of a Corsican chief, and the inscription on his hat seems to have been "Viva la Libertà."

came anxious, though he half-guessed the truth, and in reference to Boswell's confession gave his disciple a piece of his mind. "Remember that all tricks are either knavish or childish, and that it is as foolish to make experiments upon the constancy of a friend as upon the chastity of a wife."

In other ways Boswell was more successful in aping his friend's peculiarities. When in company with Johnson, he became delightfully pious. "My dear sir," he exclaimed once with unrestrained fervour, "I would fain be a good man, and I am very good now. I fear God and honour the king; I wish to do no ill and to be benevolent to all mankind." Boswell hopes, "for the felicity of human nature," that many experience this mood; though Johnson judiciously suggested that he should not trust too much to impressions. In some matters Boswell showed a touch of independence by outvying the Johnsonian prejudices. He was a warm admirer of feudal principles, and especially held to the propriety of entailing property upon heirs male. Johnson had great difficulty in persuading him to yield to his father's wishes, in a settlement of the estate which contravened this theory. But Boswell takes care to declare that his opinion was not shaken. "Yet let me not be thought," he adds, "harsh or unkind to daughters; for my notion is that they should be treated with great affection and tenderness, and always participate of the prosperity of the family." His estimate of female rights is indicated in another phrase. When Mrs. Knowles, the Quaker, expressed a hope that the sexes would be equal in another world, Boswell replied, "That is too ambitious, madam. *We* might as well desire to be equal with the angels." Boswell, again, differed from Johnson—who, in spite of his love of authority, had a righteous hatred for all recognised tyranny—by advocating the slave-trade. To abolish that trade would, he says, be robbery of the masters and cruelty to the African savages. Nay, he declares, to abolish it would be

> To shut the gates of mercy on mankind!

Boswell was, according to Johnson, "the best travelling companion in the world." In fact, for such purposes, unfailing good-humour and readiness to make talk at all hazards are high recommendations. "If, sir, you were shut up in a castle and a new-born baby with you, what would you do?" is one of his questions to Johnson,—*à propos* of nothing. That is exquisitely ludicrous, no doubt; but a man capable of preferring such a remark to silence helps at any rate to keep the ball rolling. A more objectionable trick was his habit not only of asking preposterous or indiscreet questions, but of setting people by the ears out of sheer curiosity. The appearance of so queer a satellite excited astonishment among Johnson's friends. "Who is this Scotch cur at Johnson's heels?" asked some one. "He is not a cur, replied Goldsmith; "he is only a bur. Tom Davies flung him at Johnson in sport, and he has the faculty of sticking." The bur stuck till the end of Johnson's life. Boswell visited London whenever he could, and soon

began taking careful notes of Johnson's talk. His appearance when engaged in this task long afterwards, is described by Miss Burney. Boswell, she says, concentrated his whole attention upon his idol, not even answering questions from others. When Johnson spoke, his eyes goggled with eagerness; he leant his ear almost on the Doctor's shoulder; his mouth dropped open to catch every syllable; and he seemed to listen even to Johnson's breathings as though they had some mystical significance. He took every opportunity of edging himself close to Johnson's side even at meal-times, and was sometimes ordered imperiously back to his place like a faithful but over-obtrusive spaniel.

It is hardly surprising that Johnson should have been touched by the fidelity of this queer follower. Boswell, modestly enough, attributes Johnson's easy welcome to his interest in all manifestations of the human mind, and his pleasure in an undisguised display of its workings. The last pleasure was certainly to be obtained in Boswell's society. But in fact Boswell, though his qualities were too much those of the ordinary "good fellow," was not without virtues, and still less without remarkable talents. He was, to all appearance, a man of really generous sympathies, and capable of appreciating proofs of a warm heart and a vigorous understanding. Foolish, vain, and absurd in every way, he was yet a far kindlier and more genuine man than many who laughed at him. His singular gifts as an observer could only escape notice from a careless or inexperienced reader. Boswell has a little of the true Shaksperian secret. He lets his characters show themselves without obtruding unnecessary comment. He never misses the point of a story, though he does not ostentatiously call our attention to it. He gives just what is wanted to indicate character, or to explain the full meaning of a repartee. It is not till we compare his reports with those of less skilful hearers, that we can appreciate the skill with which the essence of a conversation is extracted, and the whole scene indicated by a few telling touches. We are tempted to fancy that we have heard the very thing, and rashly infer that Boswell was simply the mechanical transmitter of the good things uttered. Any one who will try to put down the pith of a brilliant conversation within the same space, may soon satisfy himself of the absurdity of such an hypothesis, and will learn to appreciate Boswell's powers not only of memory but artistic representation. Such a feat implies not only admirable quickness of appreciation, but a rare literary faculty. Boswell's accuracy is remarkable; but it is the least part of his merit.

The book which so faithfully reflects the peculiarities of its hero and its author became the first specimen of a new literary type. Johnson himself was a master in one kind of biography; that which sets forth a condensed and vigorous statement of the essentials of a man's life and character. Other biographers had given excellent memoirs of men considered in relation to the chief historical currents of the time. But a full-length portrait of a man's domestic life with enough picturesque detail to enable us to see him through

the eyes of private friendship did not exist in the language. Boswell's originality and merit may be tested by comparing his book to the ponderous performance of Sir John Hawkins, or to the dreary dissertations, falsely called lives, of which Dugald Stewart's *Life of Robertson* may be taken for a type. The writer is so anxious to be dignified and philosophical that the despairing reader seeks in vain for a single vivid touch, and discovers even the main facts of the hero's life by some indirect allusion. Boswell's example has been more or less followed by innumerable successors; and we owe it in some degree to his example that we have such delightful books as Lockhart's *Life of Scott* or Mr. Trevelyan's *Life of Macaulay*. Yet no later biographer has been quite as fortunate in a subject; and Boswell remains as not only the first, but the best of his class.

One special merit implies something like genius. Macaulay has given to the usual compliant which distorts the vision of most biographers the name of *lues Boswelliana*. It is true that Boswell's adoration of his hero is a typical example of the feeling. But that which distinguishes Boswell, and renders the phrase unjust, is that in him adoration never hindered accuracy of portraiture. "I will not make my tiger a cat to please anybody," was his answer to well-meaning entreaties of Hannah More to soften his accounts of Johnson's asperities. He saw instinctively that a man who is worth anything loses far more than he gains by such posthumous flattery. The whole picture is toned down, and the lights are depressed as well as the shadows. The truth is that it is unscientific to consider a man as a bundle of separate good and bad qualities, of which one half may be concealed without injury to the rest. Johnson's fits of bad temper, like Goldsmith's blundering, must be unsparingly revealed by a biographer, because they are in fact expressions of the whole character. It is necessary to take them into account in order really to understand either the merits or the shortcomings. When they are softened or omitted, the whole story becomes an enigma, and we are often tempted to substitute some less creditable explanation of errors for the true one. We should not do justice to Johnson's intense tenderness, if we did not see how often it was masked by an irritability pardonable in itself, and not affecting the deeper springs of action. To bring out the beauty of a character by means of its external oddities is the triumph of a kindly humourist; and Boswell would have acted as absurdly in suppressing Johnson's weaknesses, as Sterne would have done had he made Uncle Toby a perfectly sound and rational person. But to see this required an insight so rare that it is wanting in nearly all the biographers who have followed Boswell's steps, and is the most conclusive proof that Boswell was a man of a higher intellectual capacity than has been generally admitted.

CHAPTER IV.

JOHNSON AS A LITERARY DICTATOR.

WE have now reached the point at which Johnson's life becomes distinctly visible through the eyes of a competent observer. The last twenty years are those which are really familiar to us; and little remains but to give some brief selection of Boswell's anecdotes. The task, however, is a difficult one. It is easy enough to make a selection of the gems of Boswell's narrative; but it is also inevitable that, taken from their setting, they should lose the greatest part of their brilliance. We lose all the quaint semi-conscious touches of character which make the original so fascinating; and Boswell's absurdities become less amusing when we are able to forget for an instant that the perpetrator is also the narrator. The effort, however, must be made; and it will be best to premise a brief statement of the external conditions of the life.

From the time of the pension until his death, Johnson was elevated above the fear of poverty. He had a pleasant refuge at the Thrales', where much of his time was spent; and many friends gathered round him and regarded his utterances with even excessive admiration. He had still frequent periods of profound depression. His diaries reveal an inner life tormented by gloomy forebodings, by remorse for past indolence and futile resolutions of amendment; but he could always escape from himself to a society of friends and admirers. His abandonment of wine seems to have improved his health and diminished the intensity of his melancholy fits. His literary activity, however, nearly ceased. He wrote a few political pamphlets in defence of Government, and after a long period of indolence managed to complete his last conspicuous work—the *Lives of the Poets*, which was published in 1779 and 1781. One other book of some interest appeared in 1775. It was an account of the journey made with Boswell to the Hebrides in 1773. This journey was in fact the chief interruption to the even tenour of his life. He made a tour to Wales with the Thrales in 1774; and spent a month with them in Paris in 1775. For the rest of the period he lived chiefly in London or at Streatham, making occasional trips to Lichfield and Oxford, or paying visits to Taylor, Langton, and one or two other friends. It was, however, in the London which he loved so ardently ("a man," he said once, "who is tired of London is tired of

life"), that he was chiefly conspicuous. There he talked and drank tea illimitably at his friends' houses, or argued and laid down the law to his disciples collected in a tavern instead of Academic groves. Especially he was in all his glory at the Club, which began its meetings in February, 1764, and was afterwards known as the Literary Club. This Club was founded by Sir Joshua Reynolds, "our Romulus," as Johnson called him. The original members were Reynolds, Johnson, Burke, Nugent, Beauclerk, Langton, Goldsmith, Chamier, and Hawkins. They meet weekly at the Turk's Head, in Gerard Street, Soho, at seven o'clock, and the talk generally continued till a late hour. The Club was afterwards increased in numbers, and the weekly supper changed to a fortnightly dinner. It continued to thrive, and election to it came to be as great an honour in certain circles as election to a membership of Parliament. Among the members elected in Johnson's lifetime were Percy of the *Reliques*, Garrick, Sir W. Jones, Boswell, Fox, Steevens, Gibbon, Adam Smith, the Wartons, Sheridan, Dunning, Sir Joseph Banks, Windham, Lord Stowell, Malone, and Dr. Burney. What was best in the conversation at the time was doubtless to be found at its meetings.

Johnson's habitual mode of life is described by Dr. Maxwell, one of Boswell's friends, who made his acquaintance in 1754. Maxwell generally called upon him about twelve, and found him in bed or declaiming over his tea. A levée, chiefly of literary men, surrounded him; and he seemed to be regarded as a kind of oracle to whom every one might resort for advice or instruction. After talking all the morning, he dined at a tavern, staying late and then going to some friend's house for tea, over which he again loitered for a long time. Maxwell is puzzled to know when he could have read or written. The answer seems to be pretty obvious; namely, that after the publication of the *Dictionary* he wrote very little, and that, when he did write, it was generally in a brief spasm of feverish energy. One may understand that Johnson should have frequently reproached himself for his indolence; though he seems to have occasionally comforted himself by thinking that he could do good by talking as well as by writing. He said that a man should have a part of his life to himself; and compared himself to a physician retired to a small town from practice in a great city. Boswell, in spite of this, said that he still wondered that Johnson had not more pleasure in writing than in not writing. "Sir," replied the oracle, "you *may* wonder."

I will now endeavour, with Boswell's guidance, to describe a few of the characteristic scenes which can be fully enjoyed in his pages alone. The first must be the introduction of Boswell to the sage. Boswell had come to London eager for the acquaintance of literary magnates. He already knew Goldsmith, who had inflamed his desire for an introduction to Johnson. Once when Boswell spoke of Levett, one of Johnson's dependents, Goldsmith had said, "he is poor and honest, which is recommendation enough to Johnson." Another time, when Boswell had wondered at Johnson's

kindness to a man of bad character, Goldsmith had replied, "He is now become miserable, and that insures the protection of Johnson." Boswell had hoped for an introduction through the elder Sheridan; but Sheridan never forgot the contemptuous phrase in which Johnson had referred to his fellow-pensioner. Possibly Sheridan had heard of one other Johnsonian remark. "Why, sir," he had said, "Sherry is dull, naturally dull; but it must have taken him a great deal of pains to become what we now see him. Such an excess of stupidity, sir, is not in Nature." At another time he said, "Sheridan cannot bear me; I bring his declamation to a point." "What influence can Mr. Sheridan have upon the language of this great country by his narrow exertions? Sir, it is burning a farthing candle at Dover to show light at Calais." Boswell, however, was acquainted with Davies, an actor turned bookseller, now chiefly remembered by a line in Churchhill's *Rosciad* which is said to have driven him from the stage—

He mouths a sentence as curs mouth a bone.

Boswell was drinking tea with Davies and his wife in their back parlour when Johnson came into the shop. Davies, seeing him through the glass-door, announced his approach to Boswell in the spirit of Horatio addressing Hamlet: "Look, my Lord, it comes!" Davies introduced the young Scotchman, who remembered Johnson's proverbial prejudices. "Don't tell him where I come from!" cried Boswell. "From Scotland," said Davies roguishly. "Mr. Johnson," said Boswell, "I do indeed come from Scotland; but I cannot help it!" "That, sir," was the first of Johnson's many retorts to his worshipper, "is what a great many of your countrymen cannot help."

Poor Boswell was stunned; but he recovered when Johnson observed to Davies, "What do you think of Garrick? He has refused me an order for the play for Miss Williams because he knows the house will be full, and that an order would be worth three shillings." "O, sir," intruded the unlucky Boswell, "I cannot think Mr. Garrick would grudge such a trifle to you." "Sir," replied Johnson sternly, "I have known David Garrick longer than you have done, and I know no right you have to talk to me on the subject." The second blow might have crushed a less intrepid curiosity. Boswell, though silenced, gradually recovered sufficiently to listen, and afterwards to note down parts of the conversation. As the interview went on, he even ventured to make a remark or two, which were very civilly received; Davies consoled him at his departure by assuring him that the great man liked him very well. "I cannot conceive a more humiliating position," said Beauclerk on another occasion, "than to be clapped on the back by Tom Davies." For the present, however, even Tom Davies was a welcome encourager to one who, for the rest, was not easily rebuffed. A few days afterwards Boswell ventured a call, was kindly received and detained for some time by "the giant in his

den." He was still a little afraid of the said giant, who had shortly before administered a vigorous retort to his countryman Blair. Blair had asked Johnson whether he thought that any man of a modern age could have written *Ossian*. "Yes, sir," replied Johnson, "many men, many women, and many children." Boswell, however, got on very well, and before long had the high honour of drinking a bottle of port with Johnson at the Mitre, and receiving, after a little autobiographical sketch, the emphatic approval, "Give me your hand, I have taken a liking to you."

In a very short time Boswell was on sufficiently easy terms with Johnson, not merely to frequent his levées but to ask him to dinner at the Mitre. He gathered up, though without the skill of his later performances, some fragments of the conversational feast. The great man aimed another blow or two at Scotch prejudices. To an unlucky compatriot of Boswell's, who claimed for his country a great many "noble wild prospects," Johnson replied, "I believe, sir, you have a great many, Norway, too, has noble wild prospects; and Lapland is remarkable for prodigious noble wild prospects. But, sir, let me tell you the noblest prospect which a Scotchman ever sees, is the high road that leads him to England." Though Boswell makes a slight remonstrance about the "rude grandeur of Nature" as seen in "Caledonia," he sympathized in this with his teacher. Johnson said afterwards, that he never knew any one with "such a gust for London." Before long he was trying Boswell's tastes by asking him in Greenwich Park, "Is not this very fine?" "Yes, sir," replied the promising disciple, "but not equal to Fleet Street." "You are right, sir," said the sage; and Boswell illustrates his dictum by the authority of a "very fashionable baronet," and, moreover, a baronet from Rydal, who declared that the fragrance of a May evening in the country might be very well, but that he preferred the smell of a flambeau at the playhouse. In mere serious moods Johnson delighted his new disciple by discussions upon theological, social, and literary topics. He argued with an unfortunate friend of Boswell's, whose mind, it appears, had been poisoned by Hume, and who was, moreover, rash enough to undertake the defence of principles of political equality. Johnson's view of all propagators of new opinions was tolerably simple. "Hume, and other sceptical innovators," he said, "are vain men, and will gratify themselves at any expense. Truth will not afford sufficient food to their vanity; so they have betaken themselves to error. Truth, sir, is a cow which will yield such people no more milk, and so they are gone to milk the bull." On another occasion poor Boswell, not yet acquainted with the master's prejudices, quoted with hearty laughter a "very strange" story which Hume had told him of Johnson. According to Hume, Johnson had said that he would stand before a battery of cannon to restore Convocation to its full powers. "And would I not, sir?" thundered out the sage with flashing eyes and threatening gestures. Boswell judiciously bowed to the storm, and diverted Johnson's attention. Another manifestation of orthodox prejudice was less terrible.

Boswell told Johnson that he had heard a Quaker woman preach. "A woman's preaching," said Johnson, "is like a dog's walking on his hind legs. It is not done well; but you are surprised to find it done at all."

So friendly had the pair become, that when Boswell left England to continue his studies at Utrecht, Johnson accompanied him in the stage-coach to Harwich, amusing him on the way by his frankness of address to fellow-passengers, and by the voracity of his appetite. He gave him some excellent advice, remarking of a moth which fluttered into a candle, "that creature was its own tormentor, and I believe its name was Boswell." He refuted Berkeley by striking his foot with mighty force against a large stone, till he rebounded from it. As the ship put out to sea Boswell watched him from the deck, whilst he remained "rolling his majestic frame in his usual manner." And so the friendship was cemented, though Boswell disappeared for a time from the scene, travelled on the Continent, and visited Paoli in Corsica. A friendly letter or two kept up the connexion till Boswell returned in 1766, with his head full of Corsica and a projected book of travels.

In the next year, 1767, occurred an incident upon which Boswell dwells with extreme complacency. Johnson was in the habit of sometimes reading in the King's Library, and it came into the head of his majesty that he should like to see the uncouth monster upon whom he had bestowed a pension. In spite of his semi-humorous Jacobitism, there was probably not a more loyal subject in his majesty's dominions. Loyalty is a word too often used to designate a sentiment worthy only of valets, advertising tradesmen, and writers of claptrap articles. But it deserves all respect when it reposes, as in Johnson's case, upon a profound conviction of the value of political subordination, and an acceptance of the king as the authorised representative of a great principle. There was no touch of servility in Johnson's respect for his sovereign, a respect fully reconcilable with a sense of his own personal dignity. Johnson spoke of his interview with an unfeigned satisfaction, which it would be difficult in these days to preserve from the taint of snobbishness. He described it frequently to his friends, and Boswell with pious care ascertained the details from Johnson himself, and from various secondary sources. He contrived afterwards to get his minute submitted to the King himself, who graciously authorised its publication. When he was preparing his biography, he published this account with the letter to Chesterfield in a small pamphlet sold at a prohibitory price, in order to secure the copyright.

"I find," said Johnson afterwards, "that it does a man good to be talked to by his sovereign. In the first place a man cannot be in a passion." What other advantages he perceived must be unknown, for here the oracle was interrupted. But whatever the advantages, it could hardly be reckoned amongst them, that there would be room for the hearty cut and thrust retorts which enlivened his ordinary talk. To us accordingly the conversation is chiefly

interesting as illustrating what Johnson meant by his politeness. He found that the King wanted him to talk, and he talked accordingly. He spoke in a "firm manly manner, with a sonorous voice," and not in the subdued tone customary at formal receptions. He dilated upon various literary topics, on the libraries of Oxford and Cambridge, on some contemporary controversies, on the quack Dr. Hill, and upon the reviews of the day. All that is worth repeating is a complimentary passage which shows Johnson's possession of that courtesy which rests upon sense and self-respect. The King asked whether he was writing anything, and Johnson excused himself by saying that he had told the world what he knew for the present, and had "done his part as a writer." "I should have thought so too," said the King, "if you had not written so well." "No man," said Johnson, "could have paid a higher compliment; and it was fit for a King to pay—it was decisive." When asked if he had replied, he said, "No, sir. When the King had said it, it was to be. It was not for me to bandy civilities with my sovereign." Johnson was not the less delighted. "Sir," he said to the librarian, "they may talk of the King as they will, but he is the finest gentleman I have ever seen." And he afterwards compared his manners to those of Louis XIV., and his favourite, Charles II. Goldsmith, says Boswell, was silent during the narrative, because (so his kind friend supposed) he was jealous of the honour paid to the dictator. But his natural simplicity prevailed. He ran to Johnson, and exclaimed in 'a kind of flutter,' "Well, you acquitted yourself in this conversation better than I should have done, for I should have bowed and stammered through the whole of it."

The years 1768 and 1769 were a period of great excitement for Boswell. He was carrying on various love affairs, which ended with his marriage in the end of 1769. He was publishing his book upon Corsica and paying homage to Paoli, who arrived in England in the autumn of the same year. The book appeared in the beginning of 1768, and he begs his friend Temple to report all that is said about it, but with the restriction that he is to conceal *all censure*. He particularly wanted Gray's opinion, as Gray was a friend of Temple's. Gray's opinion, not conveyed to Boswell, was expressed by his calling it "a dialogue between a green goose and a hero." Boswell, who was cultivating the society of various eminent people, exclaims triumphantly in a letter to Temple (April 26, 1768), "I am really the great man now." Johnson and Hume had called upon him on the same day, and Garrick, Franklin, and Oglethorpe also partook of his "admirable dinners and good claret." "This," he says, with the sense that he deserved his honours, "is enjoying the fruit of my labours, and appearing like the friend of Paoli." Johnson in vain expressed a wish that he would "empty his head of Corsica, which had filled it too long." "Empty my head of Corsica! Empty it of honour, empty it of friendship, empty it of piety!" exclaims the ardent youth. The next year accordingly saw Boswell's appearance at the Stratford Jubilee, where he pa-

raded to the admiration of all beholders in a costume described by himself (apparently) in a glowing article in the *London Magazine*. "Is it wrong, sir," he took speedy opportunity of inquiring from the oracle, "to affect singularity in order to make people stare?" "Yes," replied Johnson, "if you do it by propagating error, and indeed it is wrong in any way. There is in human nature a general inclination to make people stare, and every wise man has himself to cure of it, and does cure himself. If you wish to make people stare by doing better than others, why make them stare till they stare their eyes out. But consider how easy it is to make people stare by being absurd"—a proposition which he proceeds to illustrate by examples perhaps less telling than Boswell's recent performance.

The sage was less communicative on the question of marriage, though Boswell had anticipated some "instructive conversation" upon that topic. His sole remark was one from which Boswell "humbly differed." Johnson maintained that a wife was not the worse for being learned. Boswell, on the other hand, defined the proper degree of intelligence to be desired in a female companion by some verses in which Sir Thomas Overbury says that a wife should have some knowledge, and be "by nature wise, not learned much by art." Johnson said afterwards that Mrs. Boswell was in a proper degree inferior to her husband. So far as we can tell, she seems to have been a really sensible and good woman, who kept her husband's absurdities in check, and was, in her way, a better wife than he deserved. So, happily, are most wives.

Johnson and Boswell had several meetings in 1769. Boswell had the honour of introducing the two objects of his idolatry, Johnson and Paoli, and on another occasion entertained a party including Goldsmith and Garrick and Reynolds, at his lodgings in Old Bond Street. We can still see the meeting more distinctly than many that have been swallowed by a few days of oblivion. They waited for one of the party, Johnson kindly maintaining that six ought to be kept waiting for one, if the one would suffer more by the others sitting down than the six by waiting. Meanwhile Garrick "played round Johnson with a fond vivacity, taking hold of the breasts of his coat, looking up in his face with a lively archness," and complimenting him on his good health. Goldsmith strutted about bragging of his dress, of which Boswell, in the serene consciousness of superiority to such weakness, thought him seriously vain. "Let me tell you," said Goldsmith, "when my tailor brought home my bloom-coloured coat, he said, 'Sir, I have a favour to beg of you; when anybody asks you who made your clothes, be pleased to mention John Filby, at the Harrow, Water Lane.'" "Why, sir," said Johnson, "that was because he knew that the strange colour would attract crowds to gaze at it, and thus they might hear of him, and see how well he could make a coat even of so absurd a colour." Mr. Filby has gone the way of all tailors and bloom-coloured coats, but some of his bills are preserved. On the day of this dinner he had delivered to Goldsmith

a half-dress suit of ratteen lined with satin, costing twelve guineas, a pair of silk stocking-breeches for £2 5*s.* and a pair of bloom-coloured ditto for £1 4*s.* 6*d.* The bill, including other items, was paid, it is satisfactory to add, in February, 1771.

The conversation was chiefly literary. Johnson repeated the concluding lines of the *Dunciad;* upon which some one (probably Boswell) ventured to say that they were "too fine for such a poem —a poem on what?" "Why," said Johnson, "on dunces! It was worth while being a dunce then. Ah, sir, hadst *thou* lived in those days!" Johnson previously uttered a criticism which has led some people to think that he had a touch of the dunce in him. He declared that a description of a temple in Congreve's *Mourning Bride* was the finest he knew—finer than anything in Shakspeare. Garrick vainly protested; but Johnson was inexorable. He compared Congreve to a man who had only ten guineas in the world, but all in one coin; whereas Shakspeare might have ten thousand separate guineas. The principle of the criticism is rather curious. "What I mean is," said Johnson, "that you can show me no passage where there is simply a description of material objects, without any admixture of moral notions, which produces such an effect." The description of the night before Agincourt was rejected because there were men in it; and the description of Dover Cliff because the boats and the crows "impede yon fall." They do "not impress your mind at once with the horrible idea of immense height. The impression is divided; you pass on by computation from one stage of the tremendous space to another."

Probably most people will think that the passage in question deserves a very slight fraction of the praise bestowed upon it; but the criticism, like most of Johnson's, has a meaning which might be worth examining abstractedly from the special application which shocks the idolaters of Shakspeare. Presently the party discussed Mrs. Montagu, whose Essay upon Shakspeare had made some noise. Johnson had a respect for her, caused in great measure by a sense of her liberality to his friend Miss Williams, of whom more must be said hereafter. He paid her some tremendous compliments, observing that some China plates which had belonged to Queen Elizabeth and to her, had no reason to be ashamed of a possessor so little inferior to the first. But he had his usual professional contempt for her amateur performances in literature. Her defence of Shakspeare against Voltaire did her honour, he admitted, but it would do nobody else honour. "No, sir, there is no real criticism in it: none showing the beauty of thought, as formed on the workings of the human heart." Mrs. Montagu was reported once to have complimented a modern tragedian, probably Jephson, by saying, "I tremble for Shakspeare." "When Shakspeare," said Johnson, "has got Jephson for his rival and Mrs. Montagu for his defender, he is in a poor state indeed." The conversation went on to a recently published book, *Kames's Elements of Criticism*, which Johnson praised, whilst Goldsmith said more truly, "It is easier to write that book than to read it." Johnson went on to

speak of other critics. "There is no great merit," he said "in telling how many plays have ghosts in them, and how this ghost is better than that. You must show how terror is impressed on the human heart. In the description of night in *Macbeth* the beetle and the bat detract from the general idea of darkness—inspissated gloom."

After Boswell's marriage he disappeared for some time from London, and his correspondence with Johnson dropped, as he says, without coldness, from pure procrastination. He did not return to London till 1772. In the spring of that and the following year he renewed his old habits of intimacy, and inquired into Johnson's opinion upon various subjects ranging from ghosts to literary criticism. The height to which he had risen in the doctor's good opinion was marked by several symptoms. He was asked to dine at Johnson's house upon Easter day, 1773; and observes that his curiosity was as much gratified as by a previous dinner with Rousseau in the "wilds of Neufchatel." He was now able to report, to the amazement of many inquirers, that Johnson's establishment was quite orderly. The meal consisted of very good soup, a boiled leg of lamb with spinach, a veal pie, and a rice pudding. A stronger testimony of good-will was his election, by Johnson's influence, into the Club. It ought apparently to be said that Johnson forced him upon the Club by letting it be understood that, till Boswell was admitted, no other candidate would have a chance. Boswell, however, was, as his proposer said, a thoroughly "clubable" man, and once a member, his good humor secured his p pularity. On the important evening Boswell dined at Beauclerk's with his proposer and some other members. The talk turned upon Goldsmith's merits; and Johnson not only defended his poetry, but preferred him as a historian to Robertson. Such a judgment could be explained in Boswell's opinion by nothing but Johnson's dislike to the Scotch. Once before, when Boswell had mentioned Robertson in order to meet Johnson's condemnation of Scotch literature in general, Johnson had evaded him; "Sir, I love Robertson, and I won't talk of his book." On the present occasion he said that he would give to Robertson the advise offered by an old college tutor to a pupil; "read over your compositions, and whenever you meet with a passage which you think particularly fine, strike it out." A good anecdote of Goldsmith followed. Johnson had said to him once in the Poet's Corner at Westminster,—

Forsitan et nostrum nomen miscebitur istis.

When they got to Temple Bar Goldsmith pointed to the heads of the Jacobites upon it and slily suggested,—

Forsitan et nostrum nomen miscebitur *istis*.

Johnson next pronounced a critical Judgment which should be set against many sins of that kind. He praised the Pilgrim's Pro-

gress very warmly, and suggested that Bunyan had probably read Spenser.

After more talk the gentlemen went to the Club; and poor Boswell remained trembling with an anxiety which even the charms of Lady Di Beauclerk's conversation could not dissipate. The welcome news of his election was brought; and Boswell went to see Burke for the first time, and to receive a humorous charge from Johnson, pointing out the conduct expected from him as a good member. Perhaps some hints were given as to betrayal of confidence. Boswell seems at any rate to have had a certain reserve in repeating Club talk.

This intimacy with Johnson was about to receive a more public and even more impressive stamp. The antipathy to Scotland and the Scotch already noticed was one of Johnson's most notorious crotchets. The origin of the prejudice was forgotten by Johnson himself, though he was willing to accept a theory started by old Sheridan that it was resentment for the betrayal of Charles I. There is, however, nothing surprising in Johnson's partaking a prejudice common enough from the days of his youth, when each people supposed itself to have been cheated by the Union, and Englishmen resented the advent of swarms of needy adventurers, talking with a strange accent and hanging together with honourable but vexatious persistence. Johnson was irritated by what was, after all, a natural defence against English prejudice. He declared that the Scotch were always ready to lie on each other's behalf. "The Irish," he said, "are not in a conspiracy to cheat the world by false representations of the merits of their countrymen. No, sir, the Irish are a fair people; they never speak well of one another." There was another difference. He always expressed a generous resentment against the tyranny exercised by English rulers over the Irish people. To some one who defended the restriction of Irish trade for the good of English merchants, he said, "Sir, you talk the language of a savage. What! sir, would you prevent any people from feeding themselves, if by any honest means they can do it?" It was "better to hang or drown people at once," than weaken them by unrelenting persecution. He felt some tenderness for Catholics, especially when oppressed, and a hearty antipathy towards prosperous Presbyterians. The Lowland Scotch were typified by John Knox, in regard to whom he expressed a hope, after viewing the ruins of St. Andrew's, that he was buried "in the highway."

This sturdy British and High Church prejudice did not prevent the worthy doctor from having many warm friendships with Scotchmen, and helping many distressed Scotchmen in London. Most of the amanuenses employed for his *Dictionary* were Scotch. But he nourished the prejudice the more as giving an excellent pretext for many keen gibes. "Scotch learning," he said, for example, "is like bread in a besieged town. Every man gets a mouthful, but no man a bellyful." Once Strahan said in answer to some abusive remarks, "Well, sir, God made Scotland." "Certainly,"

replied Johnson, "but we must always remember that He made it for Scotchmen; and comparisons are odious, Mr. Strahan, but God made hell."

Boswell, therefore, had reason to feel both triumph and alarm when he induced the great man to accompany him in a Scotch. tour. Boswell's journal of the tour appeared soon after Johnson's death. Johnson himself wrote an account of it, which is not without interest, though it is in his dignified style, which does not condescend to Boswellian touches of character. In 1773 the Scotch Highlands were still a little known region, justifying a book descriptive of manners and customs, and touching upon antiquities now the commonplaces of innumerable guide books. Scott was still an infant, and the day of enthusiasm, real or affected, for mountain scenery had not yet dawned. Neither of the travellers, as Boswell remarks, cared much for "rural beauties." Johnson says quaintly on the shores of Loch Ness, "It will very readily occur that this uniformity of barrenness can afford very little amusement to the traveller; that it is easy to sit at home and conceive rocks and heath and waterfalls; and that these journeys are useless labours, which neither impregnate the imagination nor enlarge the understanding." And though he shortly afterwards sits down on a bank "such as a writer of romance might have delighted to feign," and there conceived the thought of his book, he does not seem to have felt much enthusiasm. He checked Boswell for describing a hill as "immense," and told him that it was only a "considerable protuberance." Indeed it is not surprising if he sometimes grew weary in long rides upon Highland ponies, or if, when weatherbound in a remote village in Skye, he declared that this was a "waste of life."

On the whole, however, Johnson bore his fatigues well, preserved his temper, and made sensible remarks upon men and things. The pair started from Edinburgh in the middle of August, 1773; they went north along the eastern coast, through St. Andrew's, Aberdeen, Banff, Fort George, and Inverness. There they took to horses, rode to Glenelg, and took boat for Skye, where they landed on the 2nd of September. They visited Rothsay, Col, Mull, and Iona, and after some dangerous sailing got to the mainland at Oban on October 2nd. Thence they proceeded by Inverary and Loch Lomond to Glasgow; and after paying a visit to Boswell's paternal mansion at Auchinleck in Ayrshire, returned to Edinburgh in November. It were too long to narrate their adventures at length, or to describe in detail how Johnson grieved over traces of the iconoclastic zeal of Knox's disciples, seriously investigated stories of second-sight, cross examined and brow-beat credulous believers in the authenticity of *Ossian*, and felt his piety grow warm among the ruins of Iona. Once or twice, when the temper of the travellers was tried by the various worries incident to their position, poor Boswell came in for some severe blows. But he was happy, feeling, as he remarks, like a dog who has run away with a large piece of meat, and is devouring it peacefully in a corner by himself.

Boswell's spirits were irrepressible. On hearing a drum beat for dinner at Fort George, he says, with a Pepys-like touch, "I for a little while fancied myself a military man, and it pleased me." He got scandalously drunk on one occasion, and showed reprehensible levity on others. He bored Johnson by inquiring too curiously into his reasons for not wearing a nightcap—a subject which seems to have interested him profoundly; he permitted himself to say in his journal that he was so much pleased with some pretty ladies' maids at the Duke of Argyll's, that he felt he could "have been a knight-errant for them," and his "venerable fellow-traveller" read the passage without censuring his levity. The great man himself could be equally volatile. "I *have often thought*," he observed one day, to Boswell's amusement, "that if I kept a seraglio, the ladies should all wear linen gowns"—as more cleanly. The pair agreed in trying to stimulate the feudal zeal of various Highland chiefs with whom they came in contact, and who were unreasonable enough to show a hankering after the luxuries of civilisation.

Though Johnson seems to have been generally on his best behaviour, he had a rough encounter or two with some of the more civilised natives. Boswell piloted him safely through a visit to Lord Monboddo, a man of real ability, though the proprietor of crochets as eccentric as Johnson's, and consequently divided from him by strong mutual prejudices. At Auchinleck he was less fortunate. The old laird, who was the staunchest of Whigs, had not relished his son's hero-worship. "There is nae hope for Jamie, mon; Jamie is gaen clean gyte. What do you think, mon? He's done wi' Paoli—he's off wi' the land-louping scoundrel of a Corsican, and who's tail do you think he's pinned himself to now, mon?" "Here," says Sir Walter Scott, the authority for the story, "the old judge summoned up a sneer of most sovereign contempt. 'A dominie, mon—an auld dominie—he keeped a schule and caauld it an acaademy.'" The two managed to keep the peace till, one day during Johnson's visit, they got upon Oliver Cromwell. Boswell suppresses the scene with obvious reluctance, his openness being checked for once by filial respect. Scott has fortunately preserved the climax of old Boswell's argument. "What had Cromwell done for his country?" asked Johnson. "God, Doctor, he gart Kings ken that they had a *lith* in their necks," retorted the laird, in a phrase worthy of Mr. Carlyle himself. Scott reports one other scene, at which respectable commentators, like Croker, hold up their hands in horror. Should we regret or rejoice to say that it involves an obvious inaccuracy? The authority, however, is too good to allow us to suppose that it was without some foundation. Adam Smith, it is said, met Johnson at Glasgow and had an altercation with him about the well-known account of Hume's death. As Hume did not die till three years later, there must be some error in this. The dispute, however, whatever its date or subject, ended by Johnson saying to Smith "*You lie.*" "And what did you reply?" was asked of Smith. "I said 'you are a son of a——.'" "On such terms," says Scott, "did these two great

moralists meet and part, and such was the classical dialogue between these two great teachers of morality."

In the year 1774 Boswell found it expedient to atone for his long absence in the previous year by staying at home. Johnson managed to complete his account of the *Scotch Tour*, which was published at the end of the year. Among other consequences was a violent controversy with the lovers of *Ossian*. Johnson was a thorough sceptic as to the authenticity of the book. His scepticism did not repose upon the philological or antiquarian reasonings, which would be applicable in the controversy from internal evidence. It was to some extent the expression of a general incredulity which astonished his friends, especially when contrasted with his tenderness for many puerile superstitions. He could scarcely be induced to admit the truth of any narrative which struck him as odd, and it was long, for example, before he would believe even in the Lisbon earthquake. Yet he seriously discussed the truth of second-sight; he carefully investigated the Cock-lane ghost—a goblin who anticipated some of the modern phenomena of so-called "spiritualism," and with almost equal absurdity; he told stories to Boswell about a "shadowy being" which had once been seen by Cave, and declared that he had once heard his mother call "Sam" when he was at Oxford and she at Lichfield. The apparent inconsistency was in truth natural enough. Any man who clings with unreasonable pertinacity to the prejudices of his childhood, must be alternately credulous and sceptical in excess. In both cases, he judges by his fancies in defiance of evidence; and accepts and rejects according to his likes and dislikes, instead of his estimates of logical proof. *Ossian* would be naturally offensive to Johnson, as one of the earliest and most remarkable manifestations of that growing taste for what was called "Nature," as opposed to civilisation, of which Rousseau was the great mouthpiece. Nobody more heartily despised this form of "cant" than Johnson. A man who utterly despised the scenery of the Hebrides as compared with Greenwich Park or Charing Cross, would hardly take kindly to the Ossianesque version of the mountain passion. The book struck him as sheer rubbish. I have already quoted the retort about "many men, many women, and many children." "A man," he said, on another occasion, "might write such stuff for ever, if he would abandon his mind to it."

The precise point, however, upon which he rested his case, was the tangible one of the inability of Macpherson to produce the manuscripts of which he had affirmed the existence. Macpherson wrote a furious letter to Johnson, of which the purport can only be inferred from Johnson's smashing retort,—

"Mr. James MacPherson, I have received your foolish and impudent letter. Any violence offered me I shall do my best to repel; and what I cannot do for myself, the law shall do for me. I hope I shall never be deterred from detecting what I think a cheat by the menaces of a ruffian.

"What would you have me retract? I thought your book an

imposture: I think it an imposture still. For this opinion I have given my reasons to the public, which I here dare you to refute. Your rage I defy. Your abilities, since your *Homer*, are not so formidable; and what I hear of your morals inclines me to pay regard not to what you shall say, but to what you shall prove. You may print this if you will.

"SAM. JOHNSON."

And so laying in a tremendous cudgel, the old gentleman (he was now sixty-six) awaited the assault, which, however, was not delivered.

In 1775 Boswell again came to London, and renewed some of the Scotch discussions. He attended a meeting of the Literary Club, and found the members disposed to laugh at Johnson's tenderness to the stories about second-sight. Boswell heroically avowed his own belief. "The evidence" he said, "is enough for me, though not for his great mind. What will not fill a quart bottle, will fill a pint bottle. I am filled with belief." "Are you?" said Colman; "then cork it up."

It was during this and the next few years that Boswell laboured most successfully in gathering materials for his book. In 1777 he only met Johnson in the country. In 1779, for some unexplained reason, he was lazy in making notes; in 1780 and 1781 he was absent from London; and in the following year, Johnson was visibly declining. The tenour of Johnson's life was interrupted during this period by no remarkable incidents, and his literary activity was not great, although the composition of the *Lives of the Poets* falls between 1777 and 1780. His mind, however, as represented by his talk, was in full vigour. I will take in order of time a few of the passages recorded by Boswell, which may serve for various reasons to afford the best illustration of his character. Yet it may be worth while once more to repeat the warning that such fragments moved from their context must lose most of their charm.

On March 26th (1775), Boswell met Johnson at the house of the publisher, Strahan. Strahan reminded Johnson of a characteristic remark which he had formerly made, that there are "few ways in which a man can be more innocently employed than in getting money." On another occasion Johnson observed with equal truth, if less originality, that cultivating kindness was an important part of life, as well as money-making. Johnson then asked to see a country lad whom he had recommended to Straham as an apprentice. He asked for five guineas on account, that he might give one to the boy. "Nay, if a man recommends a boy and does nothing for him, it is sad work." A "little, thick short-legged boy" was accordingly brought into the courtyard, whither Johnson and Boswell descended, and the lexicographer bending himself down administered some good advice to the awe-struck lad with "slow and sonorous solemnity," ending by the presentation of the guinea

In the evening the pair formed part of a corps of party "wits," led by Sir Joshua Reynolds, to the benefit of Mrs. Abington, who

had been a frequent model of the painter. Johnson praised Garrick's prologues, and Boswell kindly reported the eulogy to Garrick, with whom he supped at Beauclerk's. Garrick treated him to a mimicry of Johnson, repeating "with pauses and half-whistling," the lines,—

> Os homini sublime dedit—cœlumque tueri
> Jussit—et erectos ad sidera tollere vultus :

looking downwards, and at the end touching the ground with a contorted gesticulation. Garrick was generally jealous of Johnson's light opinion of him, and used to take off his old master, saying, "Davy has some convivial pleasantry about him, but 'tis a futile fellow."

Next day, at Thrales', Johnson fell foul of Gray, one of his pet aversions. Boswell denied that Gray was dull in poetry. "Sir," replied Johnson, "he was dull in company, dull in his closet, dull everywhere. He was dull in a new way, and that made people think him great. He was a mechanical poet." He proceeded to say that there were only two good stanzas in the *Elegy*. Johnson's criticism was perverse ; but if we were to collect a few of the judgments passed by contemporaries upon each other, it would be scarcely exceptional in its want of appreciation. It is rather odd to remark that Gray was generally condemned for obscurity—a charge which seems strangely out of place when he is measured by more recent standards.

A day or two afterwards some one rallied Johnson on his appearance at Mrs. Abington's benefit. "Why did you go?" he asked. "Did you see?" "No, sir." "Did you hear?" "No, sir." "Why, then, sir, did you go?" "Because, sir, she is a favourite of the public ; and when the public cares the thousandth part for you that it does for her, I will go to your benefit too."

The day after, Boswell won a bet from Lady Di Beauclerk by venturing to ask Johnson what he did with the orange-peel which he used to pocket. Johnson received the question amicably, but did not clear the mystery. "Then," said Boswell, "the world must be left in the dark. It must be said, he scraped them, and he let them dry, but what he did with them next he never could be prevailed upon to tell." "Nay, sir," replied Johnson, "you should say it more emphatically—he could not be prevailed upon, even by his dearest friends to tell."

This year Johnson received the degree of LL.D. from Oxford. He had previously (in 1765) received the same honour from Dublin. It is remarkable, however, that familiar as the title has become, Johnson called himself plain Mr. to the end of his days, and was generally so called by his intimates. On April 2nd, at a dinner at Hoole's, Johnson made another assault upon Gray and Mason. When Boswell said that there were good passages in Mason's *Elfrida*, he conceded that there were "now and then some good imitations of Milton's bad manner." After some more talk, Boswell

spoke of the cheerfulness of Fleet Street. "Why, sir," said Johnson, "Fleet Street has a very animated appearance, but I think that the full tide of human existence is at Charing Cross," He added a story of an eminent tallow-chandler who had made a fortune in London, and was foolish enough to retire to the country. He grew so tired of his retreat, that he begged to know the melting-days of his successor, that he might be present at the operation.

On April 7th, they dined at a tavern, where the talk turned upon *Ossian*. Some one mentioned as an objection to its authenticity that no mention of wolves occurred in it. Johnson fell into a reverie upon wild beasts, and, whilst Reynolds and Langton were discussing something, he broke out, "Pennant tells of bears." What Pennant told is unknown. The company continued to talk whilst Johnson continued his monologue, the word "bear" occurring at intervals, like a word in a catch. At last, when a pause came, he was going on: "We are told that the black bear is innocent, but I should not like to trust myself with him." Gibbon muttered in a low tone, "I should not like to trust myself with *you*"—a prudent resolution, says honest Boswell who hated Gibbon, if it referred to a competition of abilities.

The talk went on to patriotism, and Johnson laid down an apophthegm, at "which many will start," many people, in fact, having little sense of humour. Such persons may be reminded for their comfort that at this period patriot had a technical meaning. "Patriotism is the past refuge of a scoundrel." On the 10th of April he laid down another dogma, calculated to offend the weaker brethren. He defended Pope's line—

Man never *is* but always *to be* blest.

And being asked if man did not sometimes enjoy a momentary happiness, replied, "Never, but when he is drunk." It would be useless to defend these and other such utterances to any one who cannot enjoy them without defence.

On April 11th, the pair went in Reynolds's coach to dine with Cambridge, at Twickenham. Johnson was in high spirits. He remarked as they drove down, upon the rarity of good humour in life. One friend mentioned by Boswell was, he said, *acid*, and another *muddy*. At last, stretching himself and turning with complacency, he observed, "I look upon myself as a good-humoured fellow"—a bit of self-esteem against which Boswell protested. Johnson, he admitted, was good-natured; but was too irascible and impatient to be good-humoured. On reaching Cambridge's house, Johnson ran to look at the books. "Mr. Johnson," said Cambridge politely, "I am going with your pardon to accuse myself, for I have the same custom which I perceive you have. But it seems odd that one should have such a desire to look at the backs of books." "Sir," replied Johnson, wheeling about at the words, "the reason is very plain. Knowledge is of two kinds. We know a subject ourselves, or we know where we can find infor-

mation upon it. When we inquire into any subject, the first thing we have to do is to know what books have treated of it. This leads us to look at catalogues, and the backs of books in libraries."

A pleasant talk followed. Johnson denied the value attributed to historical reading, on the ground that we know very little except a few facts and dates. All the colouring, he said, was conjectural. Boswell chuckles over the reflection that Gibbon, who was present, did not take up the cudgels for his favourite study, though the first-fruits of his labours were to appear in the following year. "Probably he did not like to trust himself with Johnson."

The conversation presently turned upon the *Beggar's Opera*, and Johnson sensibly refused to believe that any man had been made a rogue by seeing it. Yet the moralist felt bound to utter some condemnation of such a performance, and at last, amidst the smothered amusement of the company, collected himself to give a heavy stroke: "there is in it," he said, "such a *labefactation* of all principles as may be dangerous to morality."

A discussion followed as to whether Sheridan was right for refusing to allow his wife to continue as a public singer. Johnson defended him "with all the high spirit of a Roman senator." "He resolved wisely and nobly, to be sure. He is a brave man. Would not a gentleman be disgraced by having his wife sing publicly for hire? No, sir, there can be no doubt here. I know not if I should not prepare myself for a public singer as readily as let my wife be one."

The stout old supporter of social authority went on to denounce the politics of the day. He asserted that politics had come to mean nothing but the art of rising in the world. He contrasted the absence of any principles with the state of the national mind during the stormy days of the seventeenth century. This gives the pith of Johnston's political prejudices. He hated Whigs blindly from his cradle; but he justified his hatred on the ground that they were now all "bottomless Whigs," that is to say, that pierce where you would, you came upon no definite creed, but only upon hollow formulæ, intended as a cloak for private interest. If Burke and one or two of his friends be excepted, the remark had but too much justice.

In 1776, Boswell found Johnson rejoicing in the prospect of a journey to Italy with the Thrales. Before starting he was to take a trip to the country, in which Boswell agreed to join. Boswell gathered up various bits of advice before their departure. One seems to have commended itself to him as specially available for practice. "A man who had been drinking freely," said the moralist, "should never go into a new company. He would probably strike them as ridiculous, though he might be in unison with those who had been drinking with him." Johnson propounded another favourite theory. "A ship," he said, "was worse than a gaol. There is in a gaol better air, better company, better conveniency of every kind; and a ship has the additional disadvantage of being in danger."

On March 19th, they went by coach to the Angel at Oxford;

and next morning visited the Master of University College, who chose with Boswell to act in opposition to a very sound bit of advice given by Johnson soon afterwards — perhaps with some reference to the proceeding. "Never speak of a man in his own presence; it is always indelicate and may be offensive." The two however, discussed Johnson without reserve. The Master said that he would have given Johnson a hundred pounds for a discourse on the British Constitution; and Boswell suggested that Johnson should write two volumes of no great bulk upon Church and State, which should comprise the whole substance of the argument. "He should erect a fort on the confines of each." Johnson was not unnaturalty displeased with the dialogue, and growled out, "Why should I be always writing?"

Presently, they went to see Dr. Adams, the doctor's old friend, who had been answering Hume. Boswell, who had done his best to court the acquaintance of Voltaire, Rousseau, Wilkes, and Hume himself, felt it desirable to reprove Adams for having met Hume with civility. He aired his admirable sentiments in a long speech, observing upon the connexion between theory and practice, and remarking, by way of practical application. that, if an infidel were at once vain and ugly, he might be compared to "Cicero's beautiful image of Virtue"—which would, as he seems to think, be a crushing retort. Boswell always delighted in fighting with his gigantic backer close behind him. Johnson, as he had doubtless expected, chimed in with the argument. "You should do your best," said Johnson, "to diminish the authority, as well as dispute the arguments of your adversary, because most people are biased more by personal respect than by reasoning." "You would not jostle a chimney-sweeper," said Adams. "Yes," replied Johnson, "if it were necessary to jostle him down."

The pair proceeded by post-chaise past Blenheim, and dined at a good inn at Chapelhouse. Johnson boasted of the superiority, long since vanished if it ever existed, of English to French inns, and quoted with great emotion Shenstone's lines—

> Whoe'er has travell'd life's dull round,
> Where'er his stages may have been,
> Must sigh to think he still has found
> The warmest welcome at an inn.

As they drove along rapidly in the post-chaise, he exclaimed, "Life has not many better things than this." On another occasion he said that he should like to spend his life driving briskly in a post-chaise with a pretty woman, clever enough to add to the conversation. The pleasure was partly owing to the fact that his deafness was less troublesome in a carriage. But he admitted that there were drawbacks even to this pleasure. Boswell asked him whether he would not add a post-chaise journey to the other sole cause of happiness—namely, drunkenness. "No, sir," said Johnson, "you are driving rapidly *from* something or *to* something."

They went to Birmingham, where Boswell pumped Hector about Johnson's early days, and saw the works of Boulton, Watt's partner, who said to him, "I sell here, sir, what all the world de-desires to have—*power*." Thence they went to Lichfield, and met more of the rapidly thinning circle of Johnson's oldest friends. Here Boswell was a little scandalised by Johnson's warm exclamation on opening a letter—"One of the most dreadful things that has happened in my time!" This turned out to be the death of Thrale's only son. Boswell thought the phrase too big for the event, and was some time before he could feel a proper concern. He was, however, "curious to observe how Dr. Johnson would be affected," and was again a little scandalised by the reply to his consolatory remark that the Thrales still had daughters. "Sir," said Johnson, "don't you know how you yourself think? Sir, he wishes to propagate his name." The great man was actually putting the family sentiment of a brewer in the same category with the sentiments of the heir of Auchinleck. Johnson, however, calmed down, but resolved to hurry back to London. They stayed a night at Taylor's, who remarked that he had fought a good many battles for a physician, one of their common friends. "But you should consider, sir," said Johnson, "that by every one of your victories he is a loser; for every man of whom you get the better will be very angry, and resolve not to employ him, whereas if people get the better of you in argument about him, they will think 'We'll send for Dr. —— nevertheless!'"

It was after their return to London that Boswell won the greatest triumph of his friendship. He carried through a negotiation, to which, as Burke pleasantly said, there was nothing equal in the whole history of the *corps diplomatique*. At some moment of enthusiasm it had occurred to him to bring Johnson into company with Wilkes. The infidel demagogue was probably in the mind of the Tory High Churchman, when he threw out that pleasant little apophthegm about patriotism. To bring together two such opposites without provoking a collision would be the crowning triumph of Boswell's curiosity. He was ready to run all hazards as a chemist might try some new experiment at the risk of a destructive explosion; but being resolved, he took every precaution with admirable foresight.

Boswell had been invited by the Dillys, well-known booksellers of the day, to meet Wilkes. "Let us have Johnson," suggested the gallant Boswell. "Not for the world!" exclaimed Dilly. But, on Boswell's undertaking the negotiation, he consented to the experiment. Boswell went off to Johnson and politely invited him in Dilly's name. "I will wait upon him," said Johnson. "Provided, sir, I suppose," said the diplomatic Boswell, "that the company which he is to have is agreeable to you." "What do you mean, sir?" exclaimed Johnson. "What do you take me for? Do you think I am so ignorant of the world as to prescribe to a gentleman what company he is to have at his table?" Boswell worked the point a little farther till, by judicious manipulation, he

had got Johnson to commit himself to meeting anybody—even Jack Wilkes, to make a wild hypothesis—at the Dillys' table. Boswell retired, hoping to think that he had fixed the discussion in Johnson's mind.

The great day arrived, and Boswell, like a consummate general who leaves nothing to chance, went himself to fetch Johnson to the dinner. The great man had forgotten the engagement, and was "buffeting his books" in a dirty shirt and amidst clouds of dust. When reminded of his promise, he said that he had ordered dinner at home with Mrs. Williams. Entreaties of the warmest kind from Boswell softened the peevish old lady, to whose pleasure Johnson had referred him. Boswell flew back, announced Mrs. Williams's consent, and Johnson roared, "Frank, a clean shirt!" and was soon in a hackney-coach. Boswell rejoiced like a "fortune-hunter who has got an heiress into a post-chaise with him to set out for Gretna Green." Yet the joy was with trembling. Arrived at Dillys', Johnson found himself amongst strangers, and Boswell watched anxiously from a corner. "Who is that gentleman?" whispered Johnson to Dilly. "Mr. Arthur Lee." Johnson whistled "too-too-too" doubtfully, for Lee was a patriot and an American. "And who is the gentleman in lace?" "Mr. Wilkes, sir." Johnson subsided into a window-seat and fixed his eye on a book. He was fairly in the toils. His reproof of Boswell was recent enough to prevent him from exhibiting his displeasure, and he resolved to restrain himself.

At dinner Wilkes, placed next to Johnson, took up his part in the performance. He pacified the sturdy moralist by delicate attentions to his needs. He helped him carefully to some fine veal. "Pray give me leave, sir; it is better here—a little of the brown—some fat, sir—a little of the stuffing—some gravy—let me have the pleasure of giving you some butter. Allow me to recommend a squeeze of this orange; or the lemon, perhaps, may have more zest." "Sir, sir," cried Johnson, "I am obliged to you, sir," bowing and turning to him, with a look for some time of "surly virtue," and soon of complacency.

Gradually the conversation became cordial. Johnson told of the fascination exercised by Foote, who, like Wilkes, had succeeded in pleasing him against his will. Foote once took to selling beer, and it was so bad that the servants of Fitzherbert, one of his customers, resolved to protest. They chose a little black boy to carry their remonstrance; but the boy waited at table one day when Foote was present, and returning to his companions, said, "This is the finest man I have ever seen. I will not deliver your message; I will drink his beer." From Foote the transition was easy to Garrick, whom Johnson, as usual, defended against the attacks of others. He maintained that Garrick's reputation for avarice, though unfounded, had been rather useful than otherwise. "You despise a man for avarice, but you do not hate him." The clamour would have been more effectual, had it been directed against his living with splendour too great for a player. Johnson went on to

speak of the difficulty of getting biographical information. When he had wished to write a life of Dryden, he applied to two living men who remembered him. One could only tell him that Dryden had a chair by the fire at Will's Coffee-house in winter, which was moved to the balcony in summer. The other (Cibber) could only report that he remembered Dryden as a "decent old man, arbiter of critical disputes at Will's."

Johnson and Wilkes had one point in common—a vigorous prejudice against the Scotch, and upon this topic they cracked their jokes in friendly emulation. When they met upon a later occasion (1781, they still pursued this inexhaustible subject. Wilkes told how a privateer had completely plundered seven Scotch islands, and re-embarked with three and sixpence. Johnson now remarked in answer to somebody who said "Poor old England is lost!" "Sir, it is not so much to be lamented that old England is lost, as that the Scotch have found it." "You must know, sir," he said to Wilkes, "that I lately took my friend Boswell and showed him genuine civilized life in an English provincial town. I turned him loose at Lichfield. that he might see for once real civility, for you know he lives among savages in Scotland and among rakes in London." "Except," said Wilkes, "when he is with grave, sober, decent people like you and me." "And we ashamed of him," added Johnson, smiling.

Boswell had to bear some jokes against himself and his countrymen from the pair; but he had triumphed, and rejoiced greatly when he went home with Johnson, and heard the great man speak of his pleasant dinner to Mrs. Williams. Johnson seems to have been permanently reconciled to his foe. "Did we not hear so much said of Jack Wilkes," he remarked next year, "we should think more highly of his conversation. Jack has a great variety of talk, Jack is a scholar, and Jack has the manners of a gentleman. But, after hearing his name sounded from pole to pole as the phœnix of convivial felicity, we are disappointed in his company. He has always been at *me*, but I would do Jack a kindness rather than not. The contest is now over."

In fact, Wilkes had ceased to play any part in public life. When Johnson met him next (in 1781) they joked about such dangerous topics as some of Wilkes's political performances. Johnson sent him a copy of the *Lives*, and they were seen conversing *tete-à-tete* in confidential whispers about George II. and the King of Prussia. To Boswell's mind it suggested the happy days when the lion should lie down with the kid, or, as Dr. Barnard suggested, the goat.

In the year 1777 Johnson began the *Lives of the Poets*, in compliance with a request from the booksellers, who wished for prefaces to a large collection of English poetry. Johnson asked for this work the extremely modest sum of 200 guineas, when he might easily, according to Malone, have received 1000 or 1500. He did not meet Boswell till September, when they spent ten days together at Dr. Taylor's. The subject which specially interested

Boswell at this time was the fate of the unlucky Dr. Dodd, hanged for forgery in the previous June. Dodd seems to have been a worthless charlatan of the popular preacher variety. His crime would not in our days have been thought worthy of so severe a punishment; but his contemporaries were less shocked by the fact of death being inflicted for such a fault, than by the fact of its being inflicted on a clergyman. Johnson exerted himself to procure a remission of the sentence by writing various letters and petitions on Dodd's behalf. He seems to have been deeply moved by the man's appeal, and could "not bear the thought" that any negligence of his should lead to the death of a fellow-creature; but he said that if he had himself been in authority he would have signed the death-warrant, and for the man himself, he had as little respect as might be. He said, indeed, that Dodd was right in not joining in the "cant" about leaving a wretched world. "No, no," said the poor rogue, "it has been a very agreeable world to me." Dodd had allowed to pass for his own one of the papers composed for him by Johnson, and the Doctor was not quite pleased. When, however, Seward expressed a doubt as to Dodd's power of writing so forcibly, Johnson felt bound not to expose him. "Why should you think so? Depend upon it, sir, when any man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully." On another occasion, Johnson expressed a doubt himself as to whether Dodd had really composed a certain prayer on the night before his execution. "Sir, do you think that a man the night before he is to be hanged cares for the succession of the royal family? Though he *may* have composed this prayer then. A man who has been canting all his life may cant to the last; and yet a man who has been refused a pardon after so much petitioning, would hardly be praying thus fervently for the king."

The last day at Taylor's was characteristic. Johnson was very cordial to his disciple, and Boswell fancied that he could defend his master at "the point of his sword." "My regard for you," said Johnson, "is greater almost than I have words to express, but I do not choose to be always repeating it. Write it down in the first leaf of your pocket-book, and never doubt of it again." They became sentimental, and talked of the misery of human life. Boswell spoke of the pleasures of society. "Alas, sir," replied Johnson, like a true pessimist, "these are only struggles for happiness!" He felt exhilarated, he said, when he first went to Ranelagh, but he changed to the mood of Xerxes weeping at the sight of his army. "It went to my heart to consider that there was not one in all that brilliant circle that was not afraid to go home and think; but that the thoughts of each individual would be distressing when alone." Some years before he had gone with Boswell to the Pantheon and taken a more cheerful view. When Boswell doubted whether there were many happy people present, he said, "Yes, sir, there are many happy people here. There are many people here who are watching hundreds, and who think hundreds are watching them." The more permanent feeling was that which

he expressed in the "serene autumn night" in Taylor's garden. He was willing, however, to talk calmly about eternal punishment, and to admit the possibility of a "mitigated interpretation."

After supper he dictated to Boswell an argument in favour of the negro who was then claiming his liberty in Scotland. He hated slavery with a zeal which the excellent Boswell thought to be "without knowledge;" and on one occasion gave as a toast to some "very grave men" at Oxford, "Here's to the next insurrection of negroes in the West Indies." The hatred was combined with as hearty a dislike for American independence. "How is it," he said, "that we always hear the loudest yelps for liberty amongst the drivers of negroes?" The harmony of the evening was unluckily spoilt by an explosion of this prejudice. Boswell undertook the defence of the colonists, and the discussion became so fierce that though Johnson had expressed a willingness to sit up all night with him, they were glad to part after an hour or two, and go to bed.

In 1778, Boswell came to London and found Johnson absorbed, to an extent which apparently excited his jealousy, by his intimacy with the Thrales. They had, however, several agreeable meetings. One was at the club, and Boswell's report of the conversation is the fullest that we have of any of its meetings. A certain reserve is indicated by his using initials for the interlocutors, of whom, however, one can be easily identified as Burke. The talk began by a discussion of an antique statue, said to be the dog of Alcibiades, and valued at 1000*l*. Burke said that the representation of no animal could be worth so much. Johnson, whose taste for art was a vanishing quantity, said that the value was proportional to the difficulty. A statue, as he argued on another occasion, would be worth nothing if it were cut out of a carrot. Everything, he now said, was valuable which "enlarged the sphere of human powers." The first man who balanced a straw upon his nose, or rode upon three horses at once, deserved the applause of mankind; and so statues of animals should be preserved as a proof of dexterity, though man should not continue such fruitless labours.

The conversation became more instructive under the guidance of Burke. He maintained what seemed to his hearers a paradox, though it would be interesting to hear his arguments from some profounder economist than Boswell, that a country would be made more populous by emigration. "There are bulls enough in Ireland," he remarked incidentally in the course of the argument. "So, sir, I should think from your argument," said Johnson, for once condescending to an irresistible pun. It is recorded, too, that he once made a bull himself, observing that a horse was so slow that when it went up hill, it stood still. If he now failed to appreciate Burke's argument, he made one good remark. Another speaker said that unhealthy countries were the most populous. "Countries which are the most populous," replied Johnson, "have the most destructive diseases. That is the true state of the proposition;" and indeed, the remark applies to the case of emigration.

A discussion then took place as to whether it would be worth while for Burke to take so much trouble with speeches which never decided a vote. Burke replied that a speech, though it did not gain one vote, would have an influence, and maintained that the House of Commons was not wholly corrupt. "We are all more or less governed by interest," was Johnson's comment. "But interest will not do everything. In a case which admits of doubt, we try to think on the side which is for our interest, and generally bring ourselves to act accordingly. But the subject must admit of diversity of colouring; it must receive a colour on that side. In the House of Commons there are members enough who will not vote what is grossly absurd and unjust. No, sir, there must always be right enough, or appearance of right, to keep wrong in countenance." After some deviations, the conversation returned to this point. Johnson and Burke agreed on a characteristic statement. Burke said that from his experience he had learnt to think better of mankind. "From my experience," replied Johnson, "I have found them worse on commercial dealings, more disposed to cheat then I had any notion of; but more disposed to do one another good than I had conceived." "Less just, and more beneficent," as another speaker suggested. Johnson proceeded to say that considering the pressure of want, it was wonderful that men would do so much for each other. The greatest liar is said to speak more truth than falsehood, and perhaps the worst man might do more good than not. But when Boswell suggested that perhaps experience might increase our estimate of human happiness, Johnson returned to his habitual pessimism. "No, sir, the more we inquire, the more we shall find men less happy." The talk soon wandered off into a disquistiion upon the folly of deliberately testing the strength of our friend's affection,

The evening ended by Johnson accepting a commission to write to a friend who had given to the Club a hogshead of claret, and to request another, with "a happy ambiguity of expression," in the hopes that it might also be a present.

Some days afterwards, another conversation took place, which has a certain celebrity in Boswellian literature. The scene was at Dilly's, and the guests included Miss Seward and Mrs. Knowles, a well-known Quaker Lady. Before dinner Johnson seized upon a book which he kept in his lap during dinner, wrapped up in the table-cloth. His attention was not distracted from the various business of the hour, but he hit upon a topic which happily combined the two appropriate veins of thought. He boasted that he would write a cookery-book upon philosophical principles; and declared in opposition to Miss Seward that such a task was beyond the sphere of woman. Perhaps this led to a discussion upon the privileges of men, in which Johnson put down Mrs. Knowles, who had some hankering for women's rights, by the Shakspearian maxim that if two men ride on a horse, one must ride behind. Driven from her position in this world, poor Mrs. Knowles hoped that sexes might be equal in the next. Boswell reproved her by

the remark already quoted, that men might as well expect to be equal to angels. He enforces this view by an illustration suggested by the "Rev. Mr. Brown of Utrecht," who had observed that a great or small glass might be equally full, though not holding equal quantities. Mr. Brown intended this for a confutation of Hume, who has said that a little Miss, dressed for a ball, may be as happy as an orator who has won some triumphant success.*

The conversation thus took a theological turn, and Mrs. Knowles was fortunate enough to win Johnson's high approval. He defended a doctrine maintained by Soame Jenyns, that friendship is not a Christian virtue. Mrs. Knowles remarked that Jesus had twelve disciples, but there was *one* whom he *loved*. Johnson, "with eyes sparkling benignantly," exclaimed, "Very well indeed, madam; you have said very well!"

So far all had gone smoothly; but here, for some inexplicable reason, Johnson burst into a sudden fury against the American rebels, whom he described as "rascals, robbers, pirates," and roared out a tremendous volley, which might almost have been audible across the Atlantic. Boswell sat and trembled, but gradually diverted the sage to less exciting topics. The name of Jonathan Edwards suggested a discussion upon free will and necessity, upon which poor Boswell was much given to worry himself. Some time afterwards Johnson wrote to him, in answer to one of his lamentations: "I hoped you had got rid of all this hypocrisy of misery. What have you to do with liberty and necessity? Or what more than to hold your tongue about it?" Boswell could never take this sensible advice; but he got little comfort from his oracle. "We know that we are all free, and there's an end on't," was his statement on one occasion, and now he could only say, "All theory is against the freedom of the will, and all experience for it."

Some familiar topics followed, which play a great part in Boswell's reports. Among the favourite topics of the sentimentalists of the day was the denunciation of "luxury," and of civilised life in general. There was a disposition to find in the South Sea savages or American Indians an embodiment of the fancied state of nature. Johnson heartily despised the affectation. He was told of an American woman who had to be bound in order to keep her from savage life. "She must have been an animal, a beast," said Boswell. "Sir," said Johnson, "she was a speaking cat." Somebody quoted to him with admiration the soliloquy of an officer who had lived in the wilds of America: "Here am I, free and unrestrained, amidst the rude magnificence of nature, with the Indian woman by my side, and this gun, with which I can procure food when I want it! What more can be desired for human happiness?" "Do not allow yourself, sir," replied Johnson, "to be imposed upon by such gross absurdity. It is sad stuff; it is brutish. If a bull could speak, he might as well exclaim, 'Here am I with this cow and this

* Boswell remarks as a curious coincidence that the illustration had been used by a Dr. King, a dissenting minister. Doubtless is has been used often enough. For one instance see *Donne's Sermons* (Alford's Edition), vol. i., p. 5.

grass: what being can enjoy greater felicity?'" When Johnson implored Boswell to "clear his mind of cant," he was attacking his disciple for affecting a serious depression about public affairs; but the cant which he hated would certainly have included as its first article an admiration for the state of nature.

On the present occasion Johnson defended luxury, and said that he had learnt much from Mandeville—a shrewd cynic, in whom Johnson's hatred for humbug is exaggerated into a general disbelief in real as well as sham nobleness of sentiment. As the conversation proceeded, Johnson expressed his habitual horror of death, and caused Miss Seward's ridicule by talking seriously of ghosts and the importance of the question of their reality; and then followed an explosion, which seems to have closed this characteristic evening. A young woman had become a Quaker under the influence of Mrs. Knowles, who now proceeded to deprecate Johnson's wrath at what he regarded as an apostasy. "Madam," he said, "she is an odious wench," and he proceeded to denounce her audacity in presuming to choose a religion for herself. "She knew no more of the points of difference," he said, "than of the difference between the Copernican and Ptolemaic systems." When Mrs. Knowles said that she had the New Testament before her, he said that it was the "most difficult book in the world," and he proceeded to attack the unlucky proselyte with a fury which shocked the two ladies. Mrs. Knowles afterwards published a report of this conversation, and obtained another report, with which, however, she was not satisfied, from Miss Seward. Both of them represent the poor doctor as hopelessly confuted by the mild dignity and calm reason of Mrs. Knowles, though the triumph is painted in far the brightest colours by Mrs. Knowles herself Unluckily, there is not a trace of Johnson's manner, except in one phrase, in either report, and they are chiefly curious as an indirect testimony of Boswell's superior powers, The passage, in which both the ladies agree, is that Johnson, on the expression of Mrs. Knowles's hope that he would meet the young lady in another world, retorted that he was not fond of meeting fools anywhere.

Poor Boswell was at this time a water-drinker by Johnson's recommendation, though unluckily for himself he never broke off his drinking habits for long. They had a conversation at Paoli's, in which Boswell argued against his present practice. Johnson remarked "that wine gave a man nothing, but only put in motion what had been locked up in frost." It was a key, suggested some one, which opened a box, but the box might be full or empty. "Nay, sir," said Johnson, "conversation is the key, wine is a picklock, which forces open the box and injures it. A man should cultivate his mind, so as to have that confidence and readiness without wine which wine gives." Boswell characteristically said that the great difficulty was from "benevolence." It was hard to refuse "a good, worthy man" who asked you to try his cellar. This, according to Johnson, was mere conceit, implying an exaggerated estimate of your importance to your entertainer.

Reynolds gallantly took up the opposite side, and produced the one recorded instance of a Johnsonian blush. "I won't argue any more with you, sir," said Johnson, who thought every man to be elevated who drank wine, "you are too far gone." "I should have thought so indeed, sir, had I made such a speech as you have now done," said Reynolds; and Johnson apologised with the aforesaid blush.

The explosion was soon over on this occasion. Not long afterwards, Johnson attacked Boswell so fiercely at a dinner at Reynolds's, that the poor disciple kept away for a week. They made it up when they met next, and Johnson solaced Boswell's wounded vanity by highly commending an image made by him to express his feelings. "I don't care how often or how high Johnson tosses me, when only friends are present, for then I fall upon soft ground; but I do not like falling on stones, which is the case when enemies are present." The phrase may recall one of Johnson's happiest illustrations. When some one said in his presence that a *congé d'élire* might be considered as only a strong recommendation: "Sir," replied Johnson, "it is such a recommendation as if I should throw you out of a two-pair of stairs window, and recommend you to fall soft."

It is perhaps time to cease these extracts from Boswell's reports. The next two years were less fruitful. In 1779 Boswell was careless, though twice in London, and in 1780, he did not pay his annual visit. Boswell has partly filled up the gap by a collection of sayings made by Langton, some passages from which have been quoted, and his correspondence gives various details. Garrick died in January of 1779, and Beauclerk in March, 1780. Johnson himself seems to have shown few symptoms of increasing age; but a change was approaching, and the last years of his life were destined to be clouded, not merely by physical weakness, but by a change of circumstances which had great influence upon his happiness.

CHAPTER V.

THE CLOSING YEARS OF JOHNSON'S LIFE.

In following Boswell's guidance we have necessarily seen only one side of Johnson's life; and probably that side which had least significance for the man himself.

Boswell saw in him chiefly the great dictator of conversation; and though the reports of Johnson's talk represent his character in spite of some qualifications with unusual fulness, there were many traits very inadequately revealed at the Mitre or the Club, at Mrs. Thrale's, or in meetings with Wilkes or Reynolds. We may catch some glimpses from his letters and diaries of that inward life which consisted generally in a long succession of struggles against an oppressive and often paralysing melancholy. Another most noteworthy side to his character is revealed in his relations to persons too humble for admission to the tables at which he exerted a despotic sway. Upon this side Johnson was almost entirely loveable. We often have to regret the imperfection of the records of

> The best portion of a good man's life,
> His little, nameless, unremembered acts
> Of kindness and of love.

Everywhere in Johnson's letters and in the occasional anecdotes, we come upon indications of a tenderness and untiring benevolence which would make us forgive far worse faults than have ever been laid to his charge. Nay, the very asperity of the man's outside becomes endeared to us by the association. His irritability never vented itself against the helpless, and his rough impatience of fanciful trouble implied no want of sympathy for real sorrow. One of Mrs. Thrale's anecdotes is intended to show Johnson's harshness:—"When I one day lamented the loss of a first cousin killed in America, 'Pr'ythee, my dear,' said he, 'have done with canting; how would the world be the worse for it, I may ask, if all your relations were at once spitted like larks and roasted for Presto's supper?' Presto was the dog that lay under the table while he talked." The counter version, given by Boswell is, that Mrs. Thrale related her cousin's death in the midst of a hearty supper, and that Johnson, shocked at her want of feeling, said, "Madam, it would give *you* very little concern if all your relations were spitted like those larks, and roasted for Presto's supper." Taking

the most unfavourable version, we may judge how much real indifference to human sorrow was implied by seeing how Johnson was affected by a loss of one of his humblest friends. It is but one case of many. In 1767, he took leave, as he notes in his diary, of his "dear old friend, Catherine Chambers," who had been for about forty-three years in the service of his family. "I desired all to withdraw," he says, "then told her that we were to part for ever, and, as Christians, we should part with prayer, and that I would, if she was willing, say a short prayer beside her. She expressed great desire to hear me, and held up her poor hands as she lay in bed, with great fervour, while I prayed, kneeling by her, in nearly the following words"—which shall not be repeated here—"I then kissed her," he adds. "She told me that to part was the greatest pain that she had ever felt, and that she hoped we should meet again in a better place. I expressed, with swelled eyes, and great emotion of kindness, the same hopes. We kissed and parted—I humbly hope to meet again and part no more."

A man with so true and tender a heart could say serenely, what with some men would be a mere excuse for want of sympathy, that he "hated to hear people whine about metaphysical distresses when there was so much want and hunger in the world." He had a sound and righteous contempt for all affectation of excessive sensibility. Suppose, said Boswell to him, whilst their common friend Baretti was lying under a charge of murder, "that one of your intimate friends were apprehended for an offence for which he might be hanged." "I should do what I could," replied Johnson, "to bail him, and give him any other assistance; but if he were once fairly hanged, I should not suffer." "Would you eat your dinner that day, sir?" asks Boswell. "Yes, sir; and eat it as if he were eating with me. Why there's Baretti, who's to be tried for his life to-morrow. Friends have risen up for him upon every side; yet if he should be hanged, none of them will eat a slice of plum-pudding the less. Sir, that sympathetic feeling goes a very little way in depressing the mind." Boswell illustrated the subject by saying that Tom Davies had just written a letter to Foote, telling him that he could not sleep from concern about Baretti, and at the same time recommending a young man who kept a pickle-shop. Johnson summed up by the remark: "You will find these very feeling people are not very ready to do you good. They *pay* you by *feeling*." Johnson never objected to feeling, but to the waste of feeling.

In a similar vein he told Mrs. Thrale that a "surly fellow" like himself had no compassion to spare for "wounds given to vanity and softness," whilst witnessing the common sight of actual want in great cities. On Lady Tavistock's death, said to have been caused by grief for her husband's loss, he observed that her life might have been saved if she had been put into a small chandler's shop, with a child to nurse. When Mrs. Thrale suggested that a lady would be grieved because her friend had lost the chance of a fortune, "She will suffer as much, perhaps," he replied, "as your

horse did when your cow miscarried." Mrs. Thrale testified that he once reproached her sternly for complaining of the dust. When he knew, he said, how many poor families would perish next winter for want of the bread which the drought would deny, he could not bear to hear ladies sighing for rain on account of their complexions or their clothes. While reporting such sayings, she adds, that he loved the poor as she never saw any one else love them, with an earnest desire to make them happy. His charity was unbounded; he proposed to allow himself one hundred a year out of the three hundred of his pension; but the Thrales could never discover that he really spent upon himself more than £70, or at most £80. He had numerous dependants, abroad as well as at home, who "did not like to see him latterly, unless he brought 'em money." He filled his pockets with small cash which he distributed to beggars in defiance of politicial economy. When told that the recipients only laid it out upon gin or tobacco, he replied that it was savage to deny them the few coarse pleasures which the richer disdained. Numerous instances are given of more judicious charity. When, for example, a Benedictine monk, whom he had seen in Paris, became a Protestant, Johnson supported him for some months in London, till he could get a living. Once coming home late at night, he found a poor woman lying in the street. He carried her to his house on his back, and found that she was reduced to the lowest stage of want, poverty, and disease. He took care of her at his own charge, with all tenderness, until she was restored to health, and tried to have her put into a virtuous way of living. His house, in his later years, was filled with various waifs and strays, to whom he gave hospitality and sometimes support, defending himself by saying that if he did not help them nobody else would. The head of his household was Miss Williams, who had been a friend of his wife's, and after coming to stay with him, in order to undergo an operation for cataract, became a permanent inmate of his house. She had a small income of some £40 a year, partly from the charity of connexions of her father's, and partly arising from a little book of miscellanies published by subscription. She was a woman of some sense and cultivation, and when she died (in 1783) Johnson said that for thirty years she had been to him as a sister. Boswell's jealousy was excited during the first period of his acquaintance, when Goldsmith one night went home with Johnson, crying "I go to Miss Williams"—a phrase which implied admission to an intimacy from which Boswell was as yet excluded. Boswell soon obtained the coveted privilege, and testifies to the respect with which Johnson always treated the inmates of his family. Before leaving her to dine with Boswell at the hotel, he asked her what little delicacy should be sent to her from the tavern. Poor Miss Williams, however, was peevish, and, according to Hawkins, had been known to drive Johnson out of the room by her reproaches, and Boswell's delicacy was shocked by the supposition that she tested the fulness of cups of tea, by putting her finger inside. We are glad to know that this was a false impression, and, in fact, Miss Williams, how-

ever unfortunate in temper and circumstances, seems to have been a lady by manners and education.

The next inmate of this queer household was Robert Levett, a man who had been a waiter at a coffee-house in Paris frequented by surgeons. They had enabled him to pick up some of their art, and he set up as an "obscure practiser in physic amongst the lower people" in London. He took from them such fees as he could get, including provisions, sometimes, unfortunately for him, of the potable kind. He was once entrapped into a queer marriage, and Johnson had to arrange a separation from his wife. Johnson, it seems, had a good opinion of his medical skill, and more or less employed his services in that capacity. He attended his patron at his breakfast; breakfasting, said Percy, "on the crust of a roll, which Johnson threw to him after tearing out the crumb." The phrase, it is said, goes too far; Johnson always took pains that Levett should be treated rather as a friend than as a dependant.

Besides these humble friends, there was a Mrs. Desmoulins, the daughter of a Lichfield physician. Johnson had had some quarrel with the father in his youth for revealing a confession of the mental disease which tortured him from early years. He supported Mrs. Desmoulins none the less, giving house-room to her and her daughter, and making her an allowance of half-a-guinea a week, a sum equal to a twelfth part of his pension. Frances Barber has already been mentioned, and we have a dim vision of a Miss Carmichael, who completed what he facetiously called his "seraglio." It was anything but a happy family. He summed uptheir relations in a letter to Mrs. Thrale. "Williams," he says, "hates "every body; Levett hates Desmoulins, and does not love Williams; Desmoulins hates them both; Poll (Miss Carmichael) loves none of them." Frank Barber complained of Miss Williams's authority, and Miss Williams of Frank's insubordination. Intruders who had taken refuge under his roof, brought their children there in his absence, and grumbled if their dinners were ill-dressed. The old man bore it all, relieving himself by an occasional growl, but reproaching any who ventured to join in the growl for their indifference to the sufferings of poverty. Levett died in January, 1782; Miss Williams died after a lingering illness, in 1783, and Johnson grieved in solitude for the loss of his testy companions. A poem, composed upon Levett's death, records his feelings in language which wants the refinement of Goldsmith or the intensity of Cowper's pathos, but which is yet so sincere and tender as to be more impressive than far more elegant compositions. It will be a fitting close to this brief indication of one side of Johnson's character, too easily overlooked in Boswell's pages, to quote part of what Thackeray truly calls the "sacred verses" upon Levett:—

Well tried through many a varying year
See Levett to the grave descend,
Officious, innocent, sincere,
Of every friendless name the friend.

In misery's darkest cavern known,
His ready help was ever nigh;
Where hopeless anguish pour'd his groan,
And lonely want retired to die.

No summons mock'd by dull delay,
No petty gains disdain'd by pride
The modest wants of every day,
The toil of every day supplied.

His virtues walk'd their narrow round,
Nor made a pause, nor left a void;
And sure the eternal Master found
His single talent well employ'd.

The busy day, the peaceful night,
Unfelt, uncounted, glided by;
His frame was firm, his eye was bright,
Though now his eightieth year was nigh.

Then, with no throbs of fiery pain,
No cold gradations of decay,
Death broke at once the vital chain,
And freed his soul the easiest was.

The last stanza smells somewhat of the country tombstone; but to read the whole and to realise the deep, manly sentiment which it implies, without tears in one's eyes is to me at least impossible.

There is one little touch which may be added before we proceed to the closing years of this tender-hearted old moralist. Johnson loved little children, calling them "little dears," and cramming them with sweetmeats, though we regret to add that he once snubbed a little child rather severely for a want of acquaintance with the *Pilgrim's Progress*. His cat, Hodge, should be famous amongst the lovers of the race. He used to go out and buy oysters for Hodge, that the servants might not take a dislike to the animal from having to serve it themselves. He reproached his wife for beating a cat before the maid lest she should give a precedent for cruelty. Boswell, who cherished an antipathy to cats, suffered as seeing Hodge scrambling up Johnson's breast, whilst he smiled and robbed the beast's back and pulled its tail. Bozzy remarked that he was a fine cat. "Why, yes, sir," said Johnson; "but I have had cats whom I liked better than this," and then, lest Hodge should be put out of countenance, he added, "but he is a very fine cat, a very fine cat indeed." He told Langton once of a young gentleman, who, when last heard of, was "running about town shooting cats; but," he murmured in a kindly reverie, "Hodge shan't be shot; no, no, Hodge shall not be shot!" Once, when Johnson was staying at a house in Wales, the gardener brought in a hare which had been caught in the potatoes. The order was given to take it to the cook. Johnson asked to have it placed in his arms. He took it to the window and let it go, shouting to in-

crease its speed. When his host complained that he had perhaps spoilt the dinner, Johnson replied by insisting that the rights of hospitality included an animal which had thus placed itself under the protection of the master of the garden.

We must proceed, however, to a more serious event. The year 1781 brought with it a catastrophe which profoundly affected the brief remainder of Johnson's life Mr. Thrale, whose health had been shaken by fits, died suddenly on the 4th of April. The ultimate consequence was Johnson's loss of the second home, in which he had so often found refuge from melancholy, alleviation of physical suffering, and pleasure in social converse. The change did not follow at once, but as the catastrophe of a little social drama, upon the rights and wrongs of which a good deal of controversy has been expended.

Johnson was deeply affected by the loss of a friend whose face, as he said, "had never been turned upon him through fifteen years but with respect and benignity." He wrote solemn and affecting letters to the widow, and busied himself strenuously in her service. Thrale had made him one of his executors, leaving him a small legacy; and Johnson took, it seems, a rather simple-minded pleasure in dealing with important commercial affairs and signing cheques for large sums of more. The old man of letters, to whom three hundred a year had been superabundant wealth, was amused at finding himself in the position of a man of business, regulating what was then regarded as a princely fortune. The brewery was sold after a time, and Johnson bustled about with an ink-horn and pen in his button-hole. When asked what was the value of the property, he replied magniloquenity, "We are not here to sell a parcel of boilers and vats, but the potentiality of growing rich beyond the dreams of avarice." The brewery was in fact sold to Barclay, Perkins, and Co. for the sum of 135,000*l.*, and some years afterwards it was the largest concern of the kind in the world.

The first effect of the change was probably rather to tighten than to relax the bond of union with the Thrale family. During the winter of 1781-2, Johnson's infirmities were growing upon him. In the beginning of 1782 he was suffering from an illness which excited serious apprehensions, and he went to Mrs. Thrale's, as the only house where he could use "all the freedom that sickness requires." She nursed him carefully, and expressed her feelings with characteristic vehemence in a curious journal which he had encouraged her to keep. It records her opinions about her affairs and her family, with a frankness remarkable even in writing intended for no eye but her own. "Here is Mr. Johnson very ill," she writes on the 1st of February; . . . . "What shall we do for him? If I lose *him*, I am more than undone—friend, father, guardian, confidant! God give me health and patience! What shall I do?" There is no reason to doubt the sincerity, though they seem to represent a mood of excitement. They show that for ten months after Thrale's death Mrs. Thrale was keenly sensitive to the value of Johnson's friendship.

A change, however, was approaching. Towards the end of 1780 Mrs. Thrale had made the acquaintance of an Italian musician named Piozzi, a man of amiable and honourable character, making an independent income by his profession, but to the eyes of most people rather inoffensive than specially attractive. The friendship between Mrs. Thrale and Piozzi rapidly became closer, and by the end of 1781 she was on very intimate terms with the gentleman whom she calls "my Piozzi." He had been making a professional trip to the Continent during part of the period since her husband's death, and upon his return in November, Johnson congratulated her upon having two friends who loved her, in terms which suggest no existing feeling of jealousy. During 1782 the mutual affection of the lady and the musician became stronger, and in the autumn they had avowed it to each other, and were discussing the question of marriage.

No one who has had some experience of life will be inclined to condemn Mrs. Thrale for her passion. Rather the capacity for a passion not excited by an intrinsically unworthy object should increase our esteem for her. Her marriage with Thrale had been, as has been said, one of convenience; and, though she bore him many children and did her duty faithfully, she never loved him. Towards the end of his life he had made her jealous by very marked attentions to the pretty and sentimental Sophy Streatfield, which once caused a scene at his table; and during the last two years his mind had been weakened, and his conduct had caused her anxiety and discomfort. It is not surprising that she should welcome the warm and simple devotion of her new lover, though she was of a ripe age and the mother of grown-up daughters.

It is, however, equally plain that an alliance with a foreign fiddler was certain to shock British respectability. It is the old story of the quarrel between Philistia and Bohemia. Nor was respectability without much to say for itself. Piozzi was a Catholic as well as a foreigner; to marry him was in all probability to break with daughters just growing into womanhood, whom it was obviously her first duty to protect. The marriage, therefore, might be regarded as not merely a revolt against conventional morality, but as leading to a desertion of country, religion, and family. Her children, her husband's friends, and her whole circle were certain to look upon the match with feelings of the strongest disapproval, and she admitted to herself that the objections were founded upon something more weighty than a fear of the world's censure.

Johnson, in particular, among whose virtues one cannot reckon a superiority to British prejudice, would inevitably consider the marriage as simply degrading. Foreseeing this, and wishing to avoid the pain of rejecting advice which she felt unable to accept, she refrained from retaining her "friend, father, and guardian" in the position of "confidant." Her situation in the summer of 1782 was therefore exceedingly trying. She was unhappy at home. Her children, she complains, did not love her; her servants "devoured" her; her friends censured her; and her expenses were ex-

cessive, whilst the loss of a lawsuit strained her resources. Johnson, sickly, suffering and descending into the gloom of approaching decay, was present like a charged thunder-cloud ready to burst at any moment, if she allowed him to approach the chief subject of her thoughts. Though not in love with Mrs. Thrale, he had a very intelligible feeling of jealousy towards any one who threatened to distract her allegiance. Under such circumstances we might expect the state of things which Miss Burney described long afterwards (though with some confusion of dates). Mrs. Thrale, she says, was absent and agitated, restless in manner, and hurried in speech, forcing smiles, and averting her eyes from her friends; neglecting every one, including Johnson and excepting only Miss Burney herself, to whom the secret was confided, and the situation therefore explained. Gradually, according to Miss Burney, she became more petulant to Johnson than she was herself aware, gave palpable hints of being worried by his company, and finally excited his resentment and suspicion. In one or two utterances, though he doubtless felt the expedience of reserve, he intrusted his forebodings to Miss Burney, and declared that Streatham was lost to him for ever.

At last, in the end of August, the crisis came. Mrs. Thrale's lawsuit had gone against her. She thought it desirable to go abroad and save money. It had moreover been "long her dearest wish" to see Italy, with Piozzi for a guide. The one difficulty (as she says in her journal at the time), was that it seemed equally hard to part with Johnson or to take him with her till he had regained strength. At last, however, she took courage to confide to him her plans for travel. To her extreme annoyance he fully approved of them. He advised her to go; anticipated her return in two or three years; and told her daughter that he should not accompany them, even if invited. No behaviour, it may be admitted, could be more provoking than this unforeseen reasonableness. To nerve oneself to part with a friend, and to find the friend perfectly ready, and all your battery of argument thrown away is most vexatious. The poor man should have begged her to stay with him, or to take him with her; he should have made the scene which she professed to dread, but which would have been the best proof of her power. The only conclusion which could really have satisfied her—though she, in all probability, did not know it—would have been an outburst which would have justified a rupture, and allowed her to protest against his tyranny as she now proceeded to protest against his complacency.

Johnson wished to go to Italy two years later; and his present willingness to be left was probably caused by a growing sense of the dangers which threatened their friendship. Mrs. Thrale's anger appears in her journal. He had never really loved her, she declares; his affection for her had been interested, though even in her wrath she admits that he really loved her husband; he cared less for her conversation, which she had fancied necessary to his existence, than for her "roast beef and plumb pudden," which he now devours

too "dirtily for endurance." She was fully resolved to go, and yet she could not bear that her going should fail to torture the friend whom for eighteen years she had loved and cherished so kindly.

No one has a right at once to insist upon the compliance of his friends, and to insist that it should be a painful compliance. Still Mrs. Thrale's petulant outburst was natural enough. It requires notice because her subsequent account of the rupture has given rise to attacks on Johnson's character. Her "Anecdotes," written in 1785, show that her real affection for Johnson was still coloured by resentment for his conduct at this and a later period. They have an apologetic character which shows itself in a statement as to the origin of the quarrel, curiously different from the contemporary accounts in the diary. She says substantially, and the whole book is written so as to give probability to the assertion, that Johnson's bearishness and demands upon her indulgence had become intolerable, when he was no longer under restraint from her husband's presence. She therefore "took advantage" of her lost lawsuit and other troubles to leave London, and thus escape from his domestic tyranny. He no longer, as she adds, suffered from anything but "old age and general infirmity" (a tolerably wide exception!), and did not require her nursing. She therefore withdrew from the yoke to which she had contentedly submitted during her husband's life, but which was intolerable when her "coadjutor was no more."

Johnson's society was, we may easily believe, very trying to a widow in such a position; and it seems to be true that Thrale was better able than Mrs. Thrale to restrain his oddities, little as the lady shrunk at times from reasonable plain-speaking. But the later account involves something more than a bare suppression of the truth. The excuse about his health is, perhaps, the worst part of her case, because obviously insincere. Nobody could be more fully aware than Mrs. Thrale that Johnson's infirmities were rapidly gathering, and that another winter or two must in all probability be fatal to him. She knew, therefore, that he was never more in want of the care which, as she seems to imply, had saved him from the specific tendency to something like madness. She knew, in fact, that she was throwing him upon the care of his other friends, zealous and affectionate enough, it is true, but yet unable to supply him with the domestic comforts of Streatham. See clearly felt that this was a real injury, inevitable it might be under the circumstances, but certainly not to be extenuated by the paltry evasion as to his improved health. So far from Johnson's health being now established, she had not dared to speak until his temporary recovery from a dangerous illness, which had provoked her at the time to the strongest expressions of anxious regret. She had (according to the diary) regarded a possible breaking of the yoke in the early part of 1782 as a terrible evil, which would "more than ruin her." Even when resolved to leave Streatham, her one great difficulty is the dread of parting with Johnson, and the pecuniary troubles are the solid and conclusive reason. In the later account the money

question is the mere pretext; the desire to leave Johnson the true motive; and the long-cherished desire to see Italy with Piozzi is judiciously dropped out of notice altogether.

The truth is plain enough. Mrs. Thrale was torn by conflicting feelings. She still loved Johnson, and yet dreaded his certain disapproval of her strongest wishes. She respected him, but was resolved not to follow his advice. She wished to treat him with kindness and to be repaid with gratitude, and yet his presence and his affection were full of intolerable inconveniences. When an old friendship becomes a burden, the smaller infirmities of manner and temper to which we once submitted willingly become intolerable. She had borne with Johnson's modes of eating and with his rough reproofs to herself and her friends during sixteen years of her married life; and for nearly a year of her widowhood she still clung to him as the wisest and kindest of monitors. His manners had undergone no spasmodic change. They became intolerable when, for other reasons, she resented his possible interference, and wanted a very different guardian and confidant; and, therefore, she wished to part, and yet wished that the initiative should come from him.

The decision to leave Streatham was taken. Johnson parted with deep regret from the house; he read a chapter of the Testament in the library; he took leave of the church with a kiss; he composed a prayer commending the family to the protection of Heaven; and he did not forget to note in his journal the details of the last dinner of which he partook. This quaint observation may have been due to some valetudinary motive, or, more probably, to some odd freak of association. Once, when eating an omelette, he was deeply affected because it recalled his old friend Nugent. "Ah, my dear friend," he said "in an agony," "I shall never eat omelette with thee again!" And in the present case there is an obscure reference to some funeral connected in his mind with a meal. The unlucky entry has caused some ridicule, but need hardly convince us that his love of the family in which for so many years he had been an honoured and honour-giving inmate was, as Miss Seward amiably suggests, in great measure "kitchen-love."

No immediate rupture followed the abandonment of the Streatham establishment. Johnson spent some weeks at Brighton with Mrs. Thrale, during which a crisis was taking place, without his knowledge, in her relations to Piozzi. After vehement altercations with her daughters, whom she criticises with great bitterness for their utter want of heart, she resolved to break with Piozzi for at least a time. Her plan was to go to Bath, and there to retrench her expenses, in the hopes of being able to recall her lover at some future period. Meanwhile he left her and returned to Italy. After another winter in London, during which Johnson was still a frequent intimate of her house, she went to Bath with her daughters in April, 1783. A melancholy period followed for both the friends. Mrs. Thrale lost a younger daughter, and Johnson had a paralytic stroke in June. Death was sending preliminary warnings. A correspondence was kept up, which implies that the old terms were not ostensibly broken.

Mrs. Thrale speaks tartly more than once ; and Johnson's letters go into medical details with his customary plainness of speech, and he occasionally indulges in laments over the supposed change in her feelings. The gloom is thickening, and the old playful gallantry has died out. The old man evidently felt himself deserted, and suffered from the breaking-up of the asylum he had loved so well. The final catastrophe came in 1784, less than six months before Johnson's death.

After much suffering in mind and body, Mrs. Thrale had at last induced her daughters to consent to her marriage with Piozzi. She sent for him at once, and they were married in June, 1784. A painful correspondence followed. Mrs. Thrale announced her marriage in a friendly letter to Johnson, excusing her previous silence on the ground that discussion could only have caused them pain. The revelation, though Johnson could not have been quite unprepared, produced one of his bursts of fury. "Madam, if I interpret your letter rightly," wrote the old man, "you are ignominiously married. If it is yet undone, let us once more talk together. If you have abandoned your children and your religion, God forgive your wickedness! If you have forfeited your fame and your country, may your folly do no further mischief! If the last act is yet to do, I, who have loved you, esteemed you, reverenced you, and served you—I, who long thought you the first of womankind—entreat that before your fate is irrevocable, I may once more see you! I was, I once was, madam, most truly yours, Sam. Johnson."

Mrs. Thrale replied with spirit and dignity to this cry of blind indignation, speaking of her husband with becoming pride, and resenting the unfortunate phrase about her loss of "fame." She ended by declining further intercourse till Johnson could change his opinion of Piozzi. Johnson admitted in his reply that he had no right to resent her conduct ; expressed his gratitude for the kindness which had "soothed twenty years of a life radically wretched," and implored her ("superfluously," as she says) to induce Piozzi to settle in England. He then took leave of her with an expression of sad forebodings. Mrs. Thrale, now Mrs. Piozzi, says that she replied affectionately: but the letter is missing. The friendship was broken off, and during the brief remainder of Johnson's life, the Piozzis were absent from England.

Of her there is little more to be said. After passing some time in Italy, where she became a light of that wretched little Della Cruscan society of which some faint memory is preserved by Gifford's ridicule, now pretty nearly forgotten with its objects she returned with her husband to England. Her anecdotes of Johnson, published soon after his death, had a success which, in spite of much ridicule, encouraged her to some further literary efforts of a sprightly but ephemeral kind. She lived happily with Piozzi, and never had cause to regret her marriage. She was reconciled to her daughters sufficiently to renew a friendly intercourse: but the elder ones set up a separate establishment. Piozzi died not long afterwards. She was still a vivacious old lady, who celebrated her 80th birthday by

a ball, and is supposed at that ripe age to have made an offer of marriage to a young actor. She died in May, 1821, leaving all that she could dispose of to a nephew of Piozzi's, who had been naturalised in England.

Meanwhile Johnson was rapidly approaching the grave. His old inmates, Levett and Miss Williams, had gone before him; Goldsmith and Garrick and Beauclerk had become memories of the past; and the gloom gathered thickly around him. The old man clung to life with pathetic earnestness. Though life had been often melancholy, he never affected to conceal the horror with which he regarded death. He frequently declared that death must be dreadful to every reasonable man. "Death, my dear, is very dreadful," he says simply in a letter to Lucy Porter in the last year of his life. Still later he shocked a pious friend by admitting that the fear oppressed him. Dr. Adams tried the ordinary consolation of the divine goodness, and went so far as to suggest that hell might not imply much positive suffering. Johnson's religious views were of a different colour. "I am afraid," he said, "I may be one of those who shall be damned." "What do you mean by damned?" asked Adams. Johnson replied passionately and loudly, "Sent to hell, sir, and punished everlastingly." Remonstrances only deepened his melancholy, and he silenced his friends by exclaiming in gloomy agitation, "I'll have no more on't!" Often in these last years he was heard muttering to himself the passionate complaint of Claudio, "Ah, but to die and go we know not whither!" At other times he was speaking of some lost friend, and saying, "Poor man—and then he died!" The peculiar horror of death, which seems to indicate a tinge of insanity, was combined with utter fearlessness of pain. He called to the surgeons to cut deeper when performing a painful operation, and shortly before his death inflicted such wounds upon himself in hopes of obtaining relief as, very erroneously, to suggest the idea of suicide. Whilst his strength remained, he endeavoured to disperse melancholy by some of the old methods. In the winter of 1783-4 he got together the few surviving members of the old Ivy Lane Club, which had flourished when he was composing the *Dictionary;* but the old place of meeting had vanished, most of the original members were dead, and the gathering can have been but melancholy. He started another club at the Essex Head, whose members were to meet twice a week, with the modest fine of threepence for non-attendance. It appears to have included a rather "strange mixture" of people, and thereby to have given some scandal to Sir John Hawkins and even to Reynolds. They thought that his craving for society, increased by his loss of Streatham, was leading him to undignified concessions.

Amongst the members of the club, however, were such men as Horsley and Windham. Windham seems to have attracted more personal regard than most politicians, by a generous warmth of enthusiasm not too common in the class. In politics he was an ardent disciple of Burke's whom he afterwards followed in his sep-

aration from the new Whigs. But, though adhering to the principles which Johnson detested, he knew, like his preceptor, how to win Johnson's warmest regard. He was the most eminent of the younger generation who now looked up to Johnson as a venerable relic from the past. Another was young Burke, that very priggish and silly young man as he seems to have been, whose loss, none the less, broke the tender heart of his father. Friendships, now more interesting, were those with two of the most distinguished authoresses of the day. One of them was Hannah More, who was about this time coming to the conclusion that the talents which had gained her distinction in the literary and even in the dramatic world, should be consecrated to less secular employment. Her vivacity during the earlier years of their acquaintance exposed her to an occasional rebuff. "She does not gain upon me, sir; I think her empty-headed," was one of his remarks; and it was to her that he said, according to Mrs. Thrale, though Boswell reports a softened version of the remark, that she should "consider what her flattery was worth, before she choked him with it." More frequently, he seems to have repaid it in kind. "There was no name in poetry," he said, "which might not be glad to own her poem"—the *Bas Bleu*. Certainly Johnson did not stick at trifles in intercourse with his female friends. He was delighted, shortly before his death, to "gallant it about" with her at Oxford, and in serious moments showed a respectful regard for her merits. Hannah More, who thus sat at the feet of Johnson, encouraged the juvenile ambition of Macaulay, and did not die till the historian had grown into manhood and fame. The other friendship noticed was with Fanny Burney, who also lived to our own time. Johnson's affection for this daughter of his friend seems to have been amongst the tenderest of his old age. When she was first introduced to him at the Thrales, she was overpowered and indeed had her head a little turned by flattery of the most agreeable kind that an author can receive. The "great literary Leviathan" showed himself to have the recently published *Evelina* at his fingers' ends. He quoted, and almost acted passages. "La! Polly!" he exclaimed in a pert feminine accent, "only think! Miss has danced with a lord!" How many modern readers can assign its place to that quotation, or answer the question which poor Boswell asked in despair and amidst general ridicule for his ignorance, "What is a Brangton?" There is something pleasant in the enthusiasm with which men like Johnson and Burke welcomed the literary achievements of the young lady, whose first novels seem to have made a sensation almost as lively as that produced by Miss Brontë, and far superior to anything that fell to the lot of Miss Austen. Johnson seems also to have regarded her with personal affection. He had a tender interview with her shortly before his death; he begged her with solemn energy to remember him in her prayers; he apologised pathetically for being unable to see her, as his weakness increased; and sent her tender messages from his deathbed.

As the end drew near, Johnson accepted the inevitable like a

man. After spending most of the latter months of 1784 in the country with the friends who, after the loss of the Thrales, could give him most domestic comfort, he came back to London to die. He made his will, and settled a few matters of business, and was pleased to be told that he would be buried in Westminster Abbey. He uttered a few words of solemn advice to those who came near him, and took affecting leave of his friends. Langton, so warmly loved, was in close attendance. Johnson said to him tenderly, *Te teneam moriens deficiente manu.* Windham broke from political occupations to sit by the dying man; once Langton found Burke sitting by his bedside with three or four friends. "I am afraid," said Burke, "that so many of us must be oppressive to you." "No, sir, it is not so," replied Johnson, "and I must be in a wretched state indeed when your company would not be a delight to me." "My dear sir," said Burke, with a breaking voice, "you have always been too good to me;" and parted from his old friend for the last time. Of Reynolds, he begged three things: to forgive a debt of thirty pounds, to read the Bible, and never to paint on Sundays. A few flashes of the old humour broke through. He said of a man who sat up with him: "Sir, the fellow's an idiot; he's as awkward as a turnspit when first put into the wheel, and as sleepy as a dormouse." His last recorded words were to a young lady who had begged for his blessing: "God bless you, my dear." The same day, December 13th, 1784, he gradually sank and died peacefully. He was laid in the Abbey by the side of Goldsmith, and the playful prediction has been amply fulfilled:—

Forsitan et nostrum nomen miscebitur istis.

The names of many greater writers are inscribed upon the walls of Westminster Abbey; but scarcely any one lies there whose heart was more acutely responsive during life to the deepest and tenderest of human emotions. In visiting that strange gathering of departed heroes and statesmen and philanthropists and poets, there are many whose words and deeds have a far greater influence upon our imaginations; but there are very few whom, when all has been said, we can love so heartily as Samuel Johnson.

CHAPTER VI.

JOHNSON'S WRITINGS.

It remains to speak of Johnson's position in literature. For reasons sufficiently obvious, few men whose lives have been devoted to letters for an equal period, have left behind them such scanty and inadequate remains. Johnson, as we have seen, worked only under the pressure of circumstances; a very small proportion of his latter life was devoted to literary employment. The working hours of his earlier years were spent for the most part in productions which can hardly be called literary. Seven years were devoted to the *Dictionary*, which, whatever its merits, could be a book only in the material sense of the word, and was of course destined to be soon superseded. Much of his hack-work has doubtless passed into oblivion, and though the ordinary relic worship has gathered together fragments enough to fill twelve decent octavo volumes (to which may be added the two volumes of parliamentary reports), the part which can be called alive may be compressed into very moderate compass. Johnson may be considered as a poet, an essayist, a pamphleteer, a traveller, a critic, and a biographer. Among his poems, the two imitations of Juvenal, especially the *Vanity of Human Wishes*, and a minor fragment or two, probably deserve more respect than would be conceded to them by adherents of modern schools. His most ambitious work, *Irene*, can be read by men in whom a sense of duty has been abnormally developed. Among the two hundred and odd essays of the *Rambler*, there is a fair proportion which will deserve, but will hardly obtain, respectful attention. *Rasselas*, one of the philosophical tales popular in the last century, gives the essence of much of the *Rambler* in a different form, and to these may be added the essay upon Soame Jenyns, which deals with the same absorbing question of human happiness. The political pamphlets, and the *Journey to the Hebrides*, have a certain historical interest; but are otherwise readable only in particular passages. Much of his criticism is pretty nearly obsolete; but the child of his old age —the *Lives of the Poets*—a book in which criticism and biography are combined, is an admirable performance in spite of serious defects. It is the work that best reflects his mind, and intelligent readers who have once made its acquaintance, will be apt to turn it into a familiar companion.

If it is easy to assign the causes which limited the quantity of Johnson's work, it is more curious to inquire what was the quality which once gained for it so much authority, and which now seems to have so far lost its savour. The peculiar style which is associated with Johnson's name must count for something in both processes. The mannerism is strongly marked, and of course offensive; for by "mannerism," as I understand the word, is meant the repetition of certain forms of language in obedience to blind habit and without reference to their propriety in the particular case. Johnson's sentences seem to be contorted, as his gigantic limbs used to twitch, by a kind of mechanical spasmodic action. The most obvious peculiarity is the tendency which he noticed himself, to "use too big words and too many of them." He had to explain to Miss Reynolds that the Shakesperian line,—

> You must borrow me Garagantua's mouth,

had been applied to him because he used "big words, which require the mouth of a giant to pronounce them." It was not, however, the mere bigness of the words that distinguished his style, but a peculiar love of putting the abstract for the concrete, of using awkward inversions, and of balancing his sentences in a monotonous rhythm, which gives the appearance, as it sometimes corresponds to the reality, of elaborate logical discrimination. With all its faults the style has the merits of masculine directness. The inversions are not such as to complicate the construction. As Boswell remarks, he never uses a parenthesis; and his style, though ponderous and wearisome, is as transparent as the smarter snipsnap of Macaulay.

This singular mannerism appears in his earliest writings; it is most marked at the time of the *Rambler;* whilst in the *Lives of the Poets*, although I think that the trick of inversion has become commoner, the other peculiarities have been so far softened as (in my judgment, at least), to be inoffensive. It is perhaps needless to give examples of a tendency which marks almost every page of his writing. A passage or two from the *Rambler* may illustrate the quality of the style, and the oddity of the effect produced, when it is applied to topics of a trivial kind. The author of the *Rambler* is supposed to receive a remonstrance upon his excessive gravity from the lively Flirtilla, who wishes him to write in defence of masquerades. Conscious of his own incapacity, he applies to a man of "high reputation in gay life;" who, on the fifth perusal of Flirtilla's letter breaks into a rapture, and declares that he is ready to devote himself to her service. Here is part of the apostrophe put into the mouth of this brilliant rake. "Behold, Flirtilla, at thy feet a man grown gray in the study of those noble arts by which right and wrong may be confounded; by which reason may be blinded, when we have a mind to escape from her inspection, and caprice and appetite instated in uncontrolled command and boundless dominion! Such a casuist may surely engage with cer-

tainty of success in vindication of an entertainment which in an instant gives confidence to the timorous and kindles ardour in the cold, an entertainment where the vigilance of jealousy has so often been clouded, and the virgin is set free from the necessity of languishing in silence; where all the outworks of chastity are at once demolished; where the heart is laid open without a blush; where bashfulness may survive virtue, and no wish is crushed under the frown of modesty."

Here is another passage, in which Johnson is speaking upon a topic more within his proper province; and which contains sound sense under its weight of words. A man, he says, who reads a printed book, is often contented to be pleased without critical examination. "But," he adds, "if the same man be called to consider the merit of a production yet unpublished, he brings an imagination heated with objections to passages which he has never yet heard; he invokes all the powers of criticism, and stores his memory with Taste and Grace, Purity and Delicacy, Manners and Unities, sounds which having been once uttered by those that understood them, have been since re-echoed without meaning, and kept up to the disturbance of the world by constant repercussion from one coxcomb to another. He considers himself as obliged to show by some proof of his abilities, that he is not consulted to no purpose, and therefore watches every opening for objection, and looks round for every opportunity to propose some specious alteration. Such opportunities a very small degree of sagacity will enable him to find, for in every work of imagination, the disposition of parts, the insertion of incidents, and use of decorations may be varied in a thousand ways with equal propriety; and, as in things nearly equal that will always seem best to every man which he himself produces, the critic, whose business is only to propose without the care of execution, can never want the satisfaction of believing that he has suggested very important improvements, nor the power of enforcing his advice by arguments, which, as they appear convincing to himself, either his kindness or his vanity will press obstinately and importunately, without suspicion that he may possibly judge too hastily in favour of his own advice or inquiry whether the advantage of the new scheme be proportionate to the labour." We may still notice a "repercussion" of words from one coxcomb to another; though somehow the words have been changed or translated.

Johnson's style is characteristic of the individual and of the epoch. The preceding generation had exhibited the final triumph of common sense over the pedantry of a decaying scholasticism. The movements represented by Locke's philosophy, by the rationalising school in theology, and by the so-called classicism of Pope and his followers, are different phases of the same impulse. The quality valued above all others in philosophy, literature, and art was clear, bright, common sense. To expel the mystery which had served as a cloak for charlatans was the great aim of the time, and the method was to appeal from the professors of exploded techni-

calities to the judgment of cultivated men of the world. Berkeley places his Utopia in happy climes,—

> Where nature guides, and virtue rules,
> *Where men shall not impose for truth and sense*
> *The pedantry of courts and schools.*

Simplicity, clearness, directness are, therefore, the great virtues of thought and style. Berkeley, Addison, Pope, and Swift are the great models of such excellence in various departments of literature.

In the succeeding generation we become aware of a certain leaven of dissatisfaction with the æsthetic and intellectual code thus inherited. The supremacy of common sense, the superlative importance of clearness, is still fully acknowledged, but there is a growing undertone of dissent in form and substance. Attempts are made to restore philosophical conceptions assailed by Locke and his followers; the rationalism of the deistic or semi-deistic writers is declared to be superficial; their optimistic theories disregard the dark side of nature, and provide no sufficient utterance for the sadness caused by the contemplation of human suffering; and the polished monotony of Pope's verses begins to pall upon those who shall tread in his steps. Some daring sceptics are even inquiring whether he is a poet at all. And simultaneously, though Addison is still a kind of sacred model, the best prose writers are beginning to aim at a more complex structure of sentence, fitted for the expression of a wider range of thought and emotion.

Johnson, though no conscious revolutionist, shares this growing discontent. The *Spectator* is written in the language of the drawing-room and the coffee-house. Nothing is ever said which might not pass in conversation between a couple of "wits," with, at most, some graceful indulgence in passing moods of solemn or tender sentiment. Johnson, though devoted to society in his own way, was anything but a producer of small talk. Society meant to him an escape from the gloom which beset him whenever he was abandoned to his thoughts. Neither his education nor the manners acquired in Grub Street had qualified him to be an observer of those lighter foibles which were touched by Addison with so dexterous a hand. When he ventures upon such topics he flounders dreadfully, and rather reminds us of an artist who should attempt to paint miniatures with a mop. No man, indeed, took more of interest in what is called the science of human nature; and, when roused by the stimulus of argument, he could talk, as has been shown, with almost unrivalled vigour and point. But his favourite topics are the deeper springs of character, rather than superficial peculiarities; and his vigorous sayings are concentrated essence of strong sense and deep feeling, not dainty epigrams or graceful embodiments of delicate observation. Johnson was not, like some contemporary antiquarians, a systematic student of the English literature of the preceding centuries, but he had a strong affection for some of its chief masterpieces. Burton's *Anatomy of Melan-*

choly was, he declared, the only book which ever got him out of bed two hours sooner than he wished. Sir Thomas Browne was another congenial writer, who is supposed to have had some influence upon his style. He never seems to have directly imitated any one, though some nonsense has been talked about his "forming a style;" but it is probable that he felt a closer affinity to those old scholars, with their elaborate and ornate language and their deep and solemn tone of sentiment, than to the brilliant but comparatively superficial writers of Queen Anne's time. He was, one may say, a scholar of the old type, forced by circumstances upon the world, but always retaining a sympathy for the scholar's life and temper. Accordingly, his style acquired something of the old elaboration, though the attempt to conform to the canons of a later age renders the structure disagreeably monotonous. His tendency to pomposity is not redeemed by the *naïveté* and spontaneity of his masters.

The inferiority of Johnson's written to his spoken utterances is indicative of his divided life. There are moments at which his writing takes the terse, vigorous tone of his talk. In his letters, such as those to Chesterfield and Macpherson, and in occasional passages of his pamphlets, we see that he could be pithy enough when he chose to descend from his Latinised abstractions to good concrete English; but that is only when he becomes excited. His face when in repose, we are told, appeared to be almost imbecile; he was constantly sunk in reveries, from which he was only roused by a challenge to conversation. In his writings, for the most part, we seem to be listening to the reverie rather than the talk; we are overhearing a soliloquy in his study, not a vigorous discussion over the twentieth cup of tea; he is not fairly put upon his mettle, and is content to expound without enforcing. We seem to see a man, heavy-eyed, ponderous in his gestures, like some huge mechanism which grinds out a ponderous tissue of verbiage as heavy as it is certainly solid.

The substance corresponds to the style. Johnson has something in common with the fashionable pessimism of modern times. No sentimentalist of to-day could be more convinced that life is in the main miserable. It was his favourite theory, according to Mrs. Thrale, that all human action was prompted by the "vacuity of life." Men act solely in the hope of escaping from themselves. Evil, as a follower of Schopenhauer would assert, is the positive, and good merely the negative of evil. All desire is at bottom an attempt to escape from pain. The doctrine neither resulted from, nor generated, a philosophical theory in Johnson's case, and was in the main a generalisation of his own experience. Not the less, the aim of most of his writing is to express this sentiment in one form or other. He differs, indeed, from most modern sentimentalists, in having the most hearty contempt for useless whining. If he dwells upon human misery, it is because he feels that it is as futile to join with the optimist in ignoring, as with the pessimist in howling over the evil. We are in a sad world, full of pain, but we

have to make the best of it. Stubborn patience and hard work are the sole remedies, or rather the sole means of temporary escape. Much of the *Rambler* is occupied with variations upon this theme, and expresses the kind of dogged resolution with which he would have us plod through this weary world. Take for example this passage :—"The controversy about the reality of external evils is now at an end. That life has many miseries, and that those miseries are sometimes at least equal to all the powers of fortitude is now universally confessed; and, therefore, it is useful to consider not only how we may escape them, but by what means those which either the accidents of affairs or the infirmities of nature must bring upon us may be mitigated and lightened, and how we may make those hours less wretched which the condition of our present existence will not allow to be very happy.

"The cure for the greatest part of human miseries is not radical, but palliative. Infelicity is involved in corporeal nature, and interwoven with our being; all attempts, therefore, to decline it wholly are useless and vain; the armies of pain send their arrows against us on every side, the choice is only between those which are more or less sharp, or tinged with poison of greater or less malignity; and the strongest armour which reason can supply will only blunt their points, but cannot repel them.

"The great remedy which Heaven has put in our hands is patience, by which, though we cannot lessen the torments of the body, we can in a great measure preserve the peace of the mind, and shall suffer only the natural and genuine force of an evil, without heightening its acrimony or prolonging its effects."

It is hardly desirable for a moralist to aim at originality in his precepts. We must be content if he enforces old truths in such a manner as to convince us of the depth and sincerity of his feeling. Johnson, it must be confessed, rather abuses the moralist's privilege of being commonplace. He descants not unfrequently upon propositions so trite that even the most earnest enforcement can give them little interest. With all drawbacks, however, the moralising is the best part of the *Rambler*. Many of the papers follow the precedent set by Addison in the *Spectator*, but without Addison's felicity. Like Addison, he indulges in allegory, which, in his hands, becomes unendurably frigid and clumsy; he tries light social satire, and is fain to confess that we can spy a beard under the muffler of his feminine characters; he treats us to criticism which, like Addison's, goes upon exploded principles, but unlike Addison's, is apt to be almost wilfully outrageous. His odd remarks upon Milton's versification are the worst example of this weakness. The result is what one might expect from the attempt of a writer without an ear to sit in judgment upon the greatest master of harmony in the language.

These defects have consigned the *Rambler* to the dustiest shelves of libraries, an account for the wonder expressed by such a critic as M. Taine at the English love of Johnson. Certainly if that love were nourished, as he seems to fancy, by assiduous study

of the *Rambler*, it would be a curious phenomenon. And yet with all its faults, the reader who can plod through its pages will at least feel respect for the author. It is not unworthy of the man whose great lesson is "clear your mind of cant;"* who felt most deeply the misery of the world, but from the bottom of his heart despised querulous and sentimental complaints on one side, and optimist glasses upon the other. To him, as to some others of his temperament, the affectation of looking at the bright side of things seems to have presented itself as the bitterest of mockeries; and nothing would tempt him to let fine words pass themselves off for genuine sense. Here are some remarks upon the vanity in which some authors seek for consolation, which may illustrate this love of realities and conclude our quotations from the *Rambler*.

"By such acts of voluntary delusion does every man endeavour to conceal his own unimportance from himself. It is long before we are convinced of the small proportion which every individual bears to the collective body of mankind; or learn how few can be interested in the fortune of any single man; how little vacancy is left in the world for any new object of attention; to how small extent the brightest blaze of merit can be spread amidst the mists of business and of folly; and how soon it is clouded by the intervention of other novelties. Not only the writer of books, but the commander of armies, and the deliverer of nations, will easily outlive all noisy and popular reputation: he may be celebrated for a time by the public voice, but his actions and his name will soon be considered as remote and unaffecting, and be rarely mentioned but by those whose alliance gives them some vanity to gratify by frequent commemoration. It seems not to be sufficiently considered how little renown can be admitted in the world. Mankind are kept perpetually busy by their fears or desires, and have not more leisure from their own affairs than to acquaint themselves with the accidents of the current day. Engaged in contriving some refuge from calamity, or in shortening their way to some new possession, they seldom suffer their thoughts to wander to the past or future; none but a few solitary students have leisure to inquire into the claims of ancient heroes or sages; and names which hoped to range over kingdoms and continents shrink at last into cloisters and colleges. Nor is it certain that even of these dark and narrow habitations, these last retreats of fame, the possession will be long kept. Of men devoted to literature very few extend their views beyond some particular science, and the greater part seldom inquire, even in their own profession, for any authors but those whom the present mode of study happens to force upon their notice; they desire not to fill their minds with unfashionable knowledge, but contentedly

* Of this well-known sentiment it may be said, as of some other familiar quotations, that its direct meaning has been slightly modified in use. The emphasis is changed. Johnson's words were "Clear your *mind* of cant. You may talk as other people do; you may say to a man, sir, I am your humble servant; you are *not* his most humble servant. . . . You may *talk* in this manner; it is a mode of talking in society; but don't *think* foolishly."

resign to oblivion those books which they now find censured or neglected."

The most remarkable of Johnson's utterances upon his favourite topic of the Vanity of Human Wishes is the story of *Rasselas*. The plan of the book is simple, and recalls certain parts of Voltaire's simultaneous but incomparably more brilliant attack upon Optimism in *Candide*. There is supposed to be a happy valley in Abyssinia where the royal princes are confined in total seclusion, but with ample supplies for every conceivable want. Rasselas, who has been thus educated, becomes curious as to the outside world, and at last makes his escape with his sister, her attendant, and the ancient sage and poet, Imlac. Under Imlac's guidance they survey life and manners in various stations; they make the acquaintance of philosophers, statesmen, men of the world, and recluses; they discuss the results of their experience pretty much in the style of the *Rambler;* they agree to pronounce the sentence "Vanity of Vanities!" and finally, in a "conclusion where nothing is concluded," they resolve to return to the happy valley. The book is little more than a set of essays upon life, with just story enough to hold it together. It is wanting in those brilliant flashes of epigram, which illustrate Voltaire's pages so as to blind some readers to its real force of sentiment, and yet it leaves a peculiar and powerful impression upon the reader.

The general tone may be collected from a few passages. Here is a fragment, the conclusion of which is perhaps the most familiar of quotations from Johnson's writings. Imlac in narrating his life describes his attempts to become a poet.

"The business of a poet," said Imlac, "is to examine not the individual, but the species; to remark general properties and large appearances; he does not number the streaks of the tulip or describe the different shades in the verdure of the forest. He is to exhibit in his portraits of nature such prominent and striking features as recall the original to every mind; and must neglect the minute discriminations which one may have remarked, and another have neglected for those characteristics which are alike obvious to vigilance and carelessness."

"But the knowledge of nature is only half the task of a poet; he must be acquainted likewise with all the modes of life. His character requires that he estimate the happiness and misery of every condition; observe the power of all the passions in all their combinations, and know the changes of the human mind as they are modified by various institutions, and accidental influences of climate or custom, from the sprightliness of infancy to the despondency of decrepitude. He must divest himself of the prejudices of his age or country; he must consider right and wrong in their abstracted and invariable state; he must disregard present laws and opinions, and rise to general and transcendental truths, which will always be the same; he must therefore content himself with the slow progress of his name: contemn the applause of his own time, and commit his claims to the justice of posterity. He must write

as the interpreter of nature and the legislator of mankind, and consider himself as presiding over the thoughts and manners of future generations, as a being superior to time and place.

"His labours are not yet at an end; he must know many languages and many sciences; and that his style may be worthy of his thoughts, must by incessant practice familiarise to himself every delicacy of speech and grace of harmony."

Imlac now felt the enthusiastic fit and was proceeding to aggrandise his profession, when the prince cried out, "Enough, thou hast convinced me that no human being can ever be a poet."

Indeed, Johnson's conception of poetry is not the one which is now fashionable, and which would rather seem to imply that philosophical power and moral sensibility are so far disqualifications to the true poet.

Here, again, is a view of the superfine system of moral philosophy. A meeting of learned men is discussing the ever-recurring problem of happiness, and one of them speaks as follows:—

"The way to be happy is to live according to nature, in obedience to that universal and unalterable law with which every heart is originally impressed; which is not written on it by precept, but engraven by destiny, not instilled by education, but infused at our nativity. He that lives according to nature will suffer nothing from the delusions of hope, or importunities of desire; he will receive and reject with equability of temper, and act or suffer as the reason of things shall alternately prescribe. Other men may amuse themselves with subtle definitions or intricate ratiocinations. Let him learn to be wise by easier means: let him observe the hind of the forest, and the linnet of the grove; let him consider the life of animals whose motions are regulated by instinct; they obey their guide and are happy.

"Let us, therefore, at length cease to dispute, and learn to live; throw away the incumbrance of precepts, which they who utter them with so much pride and pomp do not understand, and carry with us this simple and intelligible maxim, that deviation from nature is deviation from happiness."

The prince modestly inquires what is the precise meaning of the advice just given.

"When I find young men so humble and so docile," said the philosopher, "I can deny them no information which my studies have enabled me to afford. To live according to nature, is to act always with due regard to the fitness arising from the relations and qualities of causes and effects, to concur with the great and unchangeable scheme of universal felicity; to co-operate with the general disposition and tendency of the present system of things.

"The prince soon found that this was one of the sages, whom he should understand less as he heard him longer."

Here, finally, is a characteristic reflection upon the right mode of meeting sorrow.

"The state of a mind oppressed with a sudden calamity," said Imlac, "is like that of the fabulous inhabitants of the new created

earth, who, when the first night came upon them, supposed that day would never return. When the clouds of sorrow gather over us, we see nothing beyond them, nor can imagine how they will be dispelled; yet a new day succeeded to the night, and sorrow is never long without a dawn of ease. But they who restrain themselves from receiving comfort, do as the savages would have done, had they put out their eyes when it was dark. Our minds, like our bodies, are in continual flux; something is hourly lost, and something acquired. To lose much at once is inconvenient to either, but while the vital powers remain uninjured, nature will find the means of reparation.

"Distance has the same effect on the mind as on the eye, and while we glide along the stream of time, whatever we leave behind us is always lessening, and that which we approach increasing in magnitude. Do not suffer life to stagnate; it will grow muddy for want of motion; commit yourself again to the current of the world; Pekuah will vanish by degrees; you will meet in your way some other favourite, or learn to diffuse yourself in general conversation."

In one respect *Rasselas* is curiously contrasted with *Candide*. Voltaire's story is aimed at the doctrine of theological optimism, and, whether that doctrine be well or ill understood, has therefore an openly sceptical tendency. Johnson, to whom nothing could be more abhorrent than an alliance with any assailant of orthodoxy, draws no inference from his pessimism. He is content to state the fact of human misery without perplexing himself with the resulting problem as to the final cause of human existence. If the question had been explicitly brought before him, he would, doubtless, have replied that the mystery was insoluble. To answer either in the sceptical or the optimistic sense was equally presumptuous. Johnson's religious beliefs in fact were not such as to suggest that kind of comfort which is to be obtained by explaining away the existence of evil. If he, too, would have said that in some sense all must be for the best in a world ruled by a perfect Creator, the sense must be one which would allow of the eternal misery of indefinite multitudes of his creatures.

But, in truth, it was characteristic of Johnson to turn away his mind from such topics. He was interested in ethical speculations, but on the practical side, in the application to life, not in the philosophy on which it might be grounded. In that direction he could see nothing but a "milking of the bull"—a fruitless or rather a pernicious waste of intellect. An intense conviction of the supreme importance of a moral guidance in this difficult world, made him abhor any rash inquiries by which the basis of existing authority might be endangered.

This sentiment is involved in many of those prejudices which have been so much, and in some sense justifiably ridiculed. Man has been wretched and foolish since the race began, and will be till it ends; one chorus of lamentation has ever been rising, in countless dialects but with a single meaning; the plausible schemes of philosophers give no solution to the everlasting riddle; the nos-

trums of politicians touch only the surface of the deeply-rooted evil; it is folly to be querulous, and as silly to fancy that men are growing worse, as that they are much better than they used to be. The evils under which we suffer are not skin deep, to be eradicated by changing the old physicians for new quacks. What is to be done under such conditions, but to hold fast as vigorously as we can to the rules of life and faith which have served our ancestors, and which, whatever their justifications, are at least the only consolation, because they supply the only guidance through this labyrinth of troubles? Macaulay has ridiculed Johnson for what he takes to be the ludicrous inconsistency of his intense political prejudice, combined with his assertion of the indifference of all forms of government. "If," says Macaulay, "the difference between two forms of government be not worth half a guinea, it is not easy to see how Whiggism can be viler than Toryism, or the Crown can have too little power." The answer is surely obvious. Whiggism is vile, according to the doctor's phrase, because Whiggism is a "negation of all principle;" it is in his view, not so much the preference of one form to another, as an attack upon the vital condition of all government. He called Burke a "Lottomless Whig" in this sense, implying that Whiggism meant anarchy; and in the next generation a good many people were led, rightly or wrongly, to agree with him by the experience of the French revolution.

This dogged conservatism has both its value and its grotesque side. When Johnson came to write political pamphlets in his later years, and to deal with subjects little familiar to his mind, the results were grotesque enough. Loving authority, and holding one authority to be as good as another, he defended with uncompromising zeal the most preposterous and tyrannical measures. The pamphlets against the Wilkite agitators and the American rebels are little more than a huge "rhinoceros" snort of contempt against all who are fools enough or wicked enough to promote war and disturbance in order to change one form of authority for another. Here is a characteristic passage, giving his view of the value of such demonstrators:—

"The progress of a petition is well known. An ejected placeman goes down to his county or his borough, tells his friends of his inability to serve them and his constituents, of the corruption of the government. His friends readily understand that he who can get nothing, will have nothing to give. They agree to proclaim a meeting. Meat and drink are plentifully provided, a crowd is easily brought together, and those who think that they know the reason of the meeting undertake to tell those who know it not. Ale and clamour unite their powers; the crowd, condensed and heated, begin to ferment with the leaven of sedition. All see a thousand evils, though they cannot suow them, and grow impatient for a remedy, though they know not what.

"A speech is then made by the Cicero of the day; he says much and suppresses more, and credit is equally given to what he tells and what he conceals. The petition is heard and universally

approved. Those who are sober enough to write, add their names, and the rest would sign it if they could.

"Every man goes home and tells his neighbour of the glories of the day; how he was consulted, and what he advised; how he was invited into the great room, where his lordship called him by his name; how he was caressed by Sir Francis, Sir Joseph, and Sir George; how he ate turtle and venison, and drank unanimity to the three brothers.

"The poor loiterer, whose shop had confined him or whose wife had locked him up, hears the tale of luxury with envy, and at last inquires what was their petition. Of the petition nothing is remembered by the narrator, but that it spoke much of fears and apprehensions and something very alarming, but that he is sure it is against the government.

"The other is convinced that it must be right, and wishes he had been there, for he loves wine and venison, and resolves as long as he lives to be against the government.

"The petition is then handed from town to town, and from house to house; and wherever it comes, the inhabitants flock together that they may see that which must be sent to the king. Names are easily collected. One man signs because he hates the papists; another because he has vowed destruction to the turnpikes; one because it will vex the parson; another because he owes his landlord nothing; one because he is rich; another because he is poor; one to show that he is not afraid; and another to show that he can write."

The only writing in which we see a distinct reflection of Johnson's talk is the *Lives of the Poets*. The excellence of that book is of the same kind as the excellence of his conversation. Johnson wrote it under pressure, and it has suffered from his characteristic indolence. Modern authors would fill as many pages as Johnson has filled lines, with the biographies of some of his heroes. By industriously sweeping together all the rubbish which is in any way connected with the great man, by elaborately discussing the possible significance of infinitesimal bits of evidence, and by disquisition upon general principles or the whole mass of contemporary literature, it is easy to swell volumes to any desired extent. The result is sometimes highly interesting and valuable, as it is sometimes a new contribution to the dust-heaps; but in any case the design is something quite different from Johnson's. He has left much to be supplied and corrected by later scholars. His aim is simply to give a vigorous summary of the main facts of his heroes' lives, a pithy analysis of their character, and a short criticism of their productions. The strong sense which is everywhere displayed, the massive style, which is yet easier and less combrous than in his earlier work, and the uprightness and independence of the judgments, make the book agreeable even where we are most inclined to dissent from its conclusions.

The criticism is that of a school which has died out under the great revolution of modern taste. The booksellers decided that

English poetry began for their purposes with Cowley, and Johnson has, therefore, nothing to say about some of the greatest names in our literature The loss is little to be regretted, since the biographical part of earlier memoirs must have been scanty, and the criticism inappreciative. Johnson, it may be said, like most of his contemporaries, considered poetry almost exclusively from the didactic and logical point of view. He always inquires what is the moral of a work of art. If he does not precisely ask "what it proves," he pays excessive attention to the logical solidity and coherence of its sentiments. He condemns not only insincerity and affectation of feeling, but all such poetic imagery as does not correspond to the actual prosaic belief of the writer. For the purely musical effects of poetry he has little or no feeling, and allows little deviation from the alternate long and short syllables neatly bound in Pope's couplets.

To many readers this would imply that Johnson omits precisely the poetic element in poetry. I must be here content to say that in my opinion it implies rather a limitation than a fundamental error. Johnson errs in supposing that his logical tests are at all adequate; but it is, I think, a still greater error to assume that poetry has no connexion, because it has not this kind of connexion, with philosophy. His criticism has always a meaning, and in the case of works belonging to his own school a very sound meaning. When he is speaking of other poetry, we can only reply that his remarks may be true, but that they are not to the purpose.

The remarks on the poetry of Dryden, Addison, and Pope are generally excellent, and always give the genuine expression of an independent judgment. Whoever thinks for himself, and says plainly what he thinks, has some merit as a critic. This, it is true, is about all that can be said for such criticism as that on *Lycidas*, which is a delicious example of the wrong way of applying strong sense to inappropriate topics. Nothing can be truer in a sense, and nothing less relevant.

"In this poem," he says, "there is no nature, for there is no truth; there is no art, for there is nothing new. Its form is that of a pastoral, easy, vulgar, and therefore disgusting; whatever images it can supply are easily exhausted, and its inherent improbability always forces dissatisfaction on the mind. When Cowley tells of Hervey that they studied together, it is easy to suppose how much he must miss the companion of his labours and the partner of his discoveries; but what image of tenderness can be excited by these lines?—

> We drove afield, and both together heard
> What time the gray fly winds her sultry horn,
> Battening our flocks with the fresh dews of night.

We know that they never drove a-field and had no flocks to batten; and though it be allowed that the representation may be allegorical, the true meaning is so uncertain and remote that it is never sought, because it cannot be known when it is found.

Among the flocks and copses and flowers appear the heathen deities: Jove and Phœbus, Neptune and Æolus, with a long train of mythological imagery such as a college easily supplies. Nothing can less display knowledge or less exercise invention than to tell how a shepherd has lost his companion, and must now feed his flocks alone, without any judge of his skill in piping; how one god asks another god what has become of Lycidae, and neither god can tell. He who thus grieves will excite no sympathy; he who thus praises will confer no honour."

This is of course utterly outrageous, and yet much of it is undeniably true. To explain why, in spite of truth, *Lycidas* is a wonderful poem, would be to go pretty deeply into the theory of poetic expression. Most critics prefer simply to shriek, being at any rate safe from the errors of independent judgment.

The general effect of the book, however, is not to be inferred from this or some other passages of antiquated and eccentric criticism. It is the shrewd sense everywhere cropping up which is really delightful. The keen remarks upon life and character, though, perhaps, rather too severe in tone, are worthy of a vigorous mind, stored with much experience of many classes, and braced by constant exercise in the conversational arena. Passages everywhere abound which, though a little more formal in expression, have the forcible touch of his best conversational sallies. Some of the prejudices, which are expressed more pithily in *Boswell*, are defended by a reasoned exposition in the *Lives*. Sentence is passed with the true judicial air; and if he does not convince us of his complete impartiality, he at least bases his decisions upon solid and worthy grounds. It would be too much, for example, to expect that Johnson should sympathise with the grand republicanism of Milton, or pardon a man who defended the execution of the blessed Martyr. He failed, therefore, to satisfy the ardent admirers of the great poet. Yet his judgment is not harsh or ungenerous, but, at worst, the judgment of a man striving to be just, in spite of some inevitable want of sympathy.

The quality of Johnson's incidental remarks may be inferred from one or two brief extracts. Here is an observation which Johnson must have had many chances of verifying. Speaking of Dryden's money difficulties, he says, "It is well known that he seldom lives frugally who lives by chance. Hope is always liberal, and they that trust her promises, make little scruple of revelling to-day on the profits of the morrow."

Here is another shrewd comment upon the compliments paid to Halifax, of whom Pope says in the character of Bufo,—

> Fed with soft dedications all day long,
> Horace and he went hand and hand in song.

"To charge all unmerited praise with the guilt of flattery, or to suppose that the economist always knows and feels the falsehoods of his assertions, is surely to discover great ignorance of human

nature and of human life. In determinations, depending not on rules, but on reference and comparison, judgment is always in some degree subject to affection. Very near to admiration is the wish to admire.

"Every man willingly gives value to the praise which he receives, and considers the sentence passed in his favour as the sentence of discernment. We admire in a friend that understanding that selected us for confidence; we admire more in a patron that bounty which, instead of scattering bounty indiscriminately, directed it to us; and if the patron be an author, those performances which gratitude forbids us to blame, affection will easily dispose us to exalt.

"To these prejudices, hardly culpable, interest adds a power always operating, though not always, because not willingly, perceived. The modesty of praise gradually wears away; and, perhaps, the pride of patronage may be in time so increased that modest praise will no longer please.

"Many a blandishment was practised upon Halifax, which he would never have known had he no other attractions than those of his poetry, of which a short time has withered the beauties. It would now be esteemed no honour by a contributor to the monthly bundles of verses, to be told that, in strains either familiar or solemn, he sings like Halifax."

I will venture to make a longer quotation from the life of Pope, which gives, I think, a good impression of his manner:—

"Of his social qualities, if an estimate be made from his letters, an opinion too favourable cannot easily be formed; they exhibit a perpetual and unclouded effulgence of general benevolence and particular fondness. There is nothing but liberality, gratitude, constancy, and tenderness. It has been so long said as to be commonly believed, that the true characters of men may be found in their letters, and that he who writes to his friends lays his heart open before him.

"But the truth is, that such were the simple friendships of the Golden Age, and are now the friendships only of children. Very few can boast of hearts which they dare lay open to themselves, and of which, by whatever accident exposed, they do not shun a distinct and continued view; and certainly what we hide from ourselves, we do not show to our friends. There is, indeed, no transaction which offers stronger temptations to fallacy and sophistication than epistolary intercourse.

"In the eagerness of conversation, the first emotions of the mind often burst out before they are considered. In the tumult of business, interest and passion have their genuine effect; but a friendly letter is a calm and deliberate performance in the cool of leisure, in the stillness of solitude, and surely no man sits down by design to depreciate his own character.

"Friendship has no tendency to secure veracity; for by whom can a man so much wish to be thought better than he is, as by him whose kindness he desires to gain or keep? Even in writing to

the world there is less constraint; the author is not confronted with his reader, and takes his chance of approbation among the different dispositions of mankind: but a letter is addressed to a single mind, of which the prejudices and partialities are known, and must therefore please, if not by favouring them, by forbearing to oppose them. To charge those favourable representations which men give of their own minds with the guilt of hypocritical falsehood, would show more severity than knowledge. The writer commonly believes himself. Almost every man's thoughts while they are general are right, and most hearts are pure while temptation is away. It is easy to awaken generous sentiments in privacy; to despise death when there is no danger; to glow with benevolence when there is nothing to be given. While such ideas are formed they are felt, and self-love does not suspect the gleam of virtue to be the meteor of fancy.

"If the letters of Pope are considered merely as compositions, they seem to be premeditated and artificial. It is one thing to write, because there is something which the mind wishes to discharge; and another to solicit the imagination, because ceremony or vanity requires something to be written. Pope confesses his early letters to be vitiated with *affectation and ambition*. To know whether he disentangles himself from these perverters of epistolary integrity, his book and his life must be set in comparison One of his favourite topics is contempt of his own poetry. For this, if it had been real, he would deserve no commendation; and in this he was certainly not sincere, for his high value of himself was sufficiently observed; and of what could he be proud but of his poetry? He writes, he says, when 'he has just nothing else to do,' yet Swift complains that he was never at leisure for conversation, because he 'had always some poetical scheme in his head.' It was punctually required that his writing-box should be set upon his bed before he rose; and Lord Oxford's domestic related that, in the dreadful w ter of '40, she was called from her bed by him four times in one night, to supply him with paper lest he should lose a thought.

"He pretends insensibility to censure and criticism, though it was observed by all who knew him that every pamphlet disturbed his quiet, and that his extreme irritability laid him open to perpetual vexation; but he wished to despise his critics, and therefore hoped he did despise them. As he happened to live in two reigns when the court paid little attention to poetry, he nursed in his mind a foolish disesteem of kings, and proclaims that 'he never sees courts.' Yet a little regard shown him by the Prince of Wales melted his obduracy; and he had not much to say when he was asked by his Royal Highness, 'How he could love a prince while he disliked kings.'"

Johnson's best poetry is the versified expression of the tone of sentiment with which we are already familiar. The *Vanity of Human Wishes* is, perhaps, the finest poem written since Pope's time and in Pope's manner, with the exception of Goldsmith's still finer performances. Johnson, it need hardly be said, has not

Goldsmith's exquisite fineness of touch and delicacy of sentiment. He is often ponderous and verbose, and one feels that the mode of expression is not that which is most congenial; and yet the vigour of thought makes itself felt through rather clumsy modes of utterance. Here is one of the best passages, in which he illustrates the vanity of military glory:—

On what foundation stands the warrior's pride,
How just his hopes let Swedish Charles decide;
A frame of adamant, a soul of fire,
No dangers fright him and no labours tire;
O'er love, o'er fear, extends his wide domain,
Unconquer'd lord of pleasure and of pain;
No joys to him pacific sceptres yield,
War sounds the trump, he rushes to the field;
Behold surrounding kings their powers combine,
And one capitulate, and one resign:
Peace courts his hand, but spreads her charms in vain.
"Think nothing gain'd," he cries, "till nought remain
On Moscow's walls till Gothic standards fly,
And all be mine beneath the polar sky."
The march begins in military state,
And nations on his eye suspended wait;
Stern Famine guards the solitary coast,
And Winter barricades the realms of Frost.
He comes, nor want nor cold his course delay—
Hide, blushing glory, hide Pultowa's day!
The vanquish'd hero leaves his broken bands,
And shows his miseries in distant lands;
Condemn'd a needy supplicant to wait,
While ladies interpose and slaves debate—
But did not Chance at length her error mend?
Did no subverted empire mark his end?
Did rival monarchs give the fatal wound?
Or hostile millions press him to the ground?
His fall was destined to a barren strand,
A petty fortress and a dubious hand;
He left the name at which the world grew pale,
To point a moral and adorn a tale.

The concluding passage may also fitly conclude this survey of Johnson's writings. The sentiment is less gloomy than is usual, but it gives the answer which he would have given in his calmer moods to the perplexed riddle of life; and, in some form or other, it is, perhaps, the best or the only answer that can be given:—

Where, then, shall Hope and Fear their objects find?
Must dull suspense corrupt the stagnant mind?
Must helpless man, in ignorance sedate,
Roll darkling down the torrent of his fate?
Must no dislike alarm, no wishes rise?
No cries invoke the mercies of the skies?
Inquirer cease; petitions yet remain
Which Heaven may hear, nor deem religion vain

W. WORDSWORTH

WORDSWORTH

BY

F. W. H. MYERS

"From worlds not quickened by the sun
A portion of the gift is won,
An intermingling of Heaven's pomp is spread
On ground which British shepherds tread."

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WORDSWORTH.

CHAPTER I.

BIRTH AND EDUCATION.—CAMBRIDGE.

I CANNOT, perhaps, more fitly begin this short biography than with some words in which its subject has expressed his own feelings as to the spirit in which such a task should be approached. "Silence," says Wordsworth, "is a privilege of the grave, a right of the departed: let him, therefore, who infringes that right by speaking publicly of, for, or against those who cannot speak for themselves, take heed that he opens not his mouth without a sufficient sanction. Only to philosophy enlightened by the affections does it belong justly to estimate the claims of the deceased, on the one hand, and of the present age and future generations, on the other, and to strike a balance between them. Such philosophy runs a risk of becoming extinct among us, if the coarse intrusions into the recesses, the gross breaches upon the sanctities, of domestic life, to which we have lately been more and more accustomed, are to be regarded as indications of a vigorous state of public feeling. The wise and good respect, as one of the noblest characteristics of Englishmen, that jealousy of familiar approach which, while it contributes to the maintenance of private dignity, is one of the most efficacious guardians of rational public freedom."

In accordance with these views the poet entrusted to his nephew, the present Bishop of Lincoln, the task of composing memoirs of his life, in the just confidence that nothing would by such hands be given to the world which was inconsistent with the dignity either of the living or of the dead. From those memoirs the facts contained in the present work have been for the most part drawn. It has, however, been my fortune, through hereditary friendships, to have access to many manuscript letters and much oral tradition bearing upon the poet's private life;* and some details and some passages of letters hitherto unpublished will appear in these pages. It would seem, however, that there is but little of public interest in

* I take this opportunity of thanking Mr. William Wordsworth, the son, and Mr. William Wordsworth, the grandson, of the poet, for help most valuable in enabling me to give a true impression of the poet's personality.

Wordsworth's life which has not already been given to the world, and I have shrunk from narrating such minor personal incidents as he would himself have thought it needless to dwell upon. I have endeavoured, in short, to write as though the Subject of this biography were himself its Auditor, listening, indeed, from some region where all of truth is discerned and nothing but truth desired, but checking by his venerable presence any such revelation as public advantage does not call for, and private delicacy would condemn.

As regards the critical remarks which these pages contain, I have only to say that I have carefully consulted such notices of the poet as his personal friends have left us, and also, I believe, nearly every criticism of importance which has appeared on his works. I find with pleasure that a considerable agreement of opinion exists —though less among professed poets or critics than among men of eminence in other departments of thought or action whose attention has been directed to Wordsworth's poems. And although I have felt it right to express in each case my own views with exactness, I have been able to feel that I am not obtruding on the reader any merely fanciful estimate in which better accredited judges would refuse to concur.

Without further preface I now begin my story of Wordsworth's life, in words which he himself dictated to his intended biographer. "I was born," he said, "at Cockermouth, in Cumberland, on April 7th, 1770, the second son of John Wordsworth, attorney-at-law—as lawyers of this class were then called—and law-agent to Sir James Lowther, afterwards Earl of Lonsdale. My mother was Anne, only daughter of William Cookson, mercer, of Penrith, and of Dorothy, born Crackanthorp, of the ancient family of that name, who from the times of Edward the Third had lived in Newbiggen Hall, Westmoreland. My grandfather was the first of the name of Wordsworth who came into Westmoreland, where he purchased the small estate of Sockbridge. He was descended from a family who had been settled at Peniston, in Yorkshire, near the sources of the Don, probably before the Norman Conquest. Their names appear on different occasions in all the transactions, personal and public, connected with that parish; and I possess, through the kindness of Colonel Beaumont, an almery, made in 1525, at the expense of a William Wordsworth, as is expressed in a Latin inscription carved upon it, which carries the pedigree of the family back four generations from him. The time of my infancy and early boyhood was passed partly at Cockermouth, and partly with my mother's parents at Penrith, where my mother, in the year 1778, died of a decline, brought on by a cold, in consequence of being put, at a friend's house in London, in what used to be called 'a best bedroom.' My father never recovered his usual cheerfulness of mind after this loss, and died when I was in my fourteenth year, a school-boy, just returned from Hawkshead, whither I had been sent with my elder brother Richard, in my ninth year.

"I remember my mother only in some few situations, one of which was her pinning a nosegay to my breast, when I was going to

catechism in the church, as was customary before Easter. An intimate friend of hers told me that she once said to her that the only one of her five children about whose future life she was anxious was William; and he, she said, would be remarkable, either for good or for evil. The cause of this was that I was of a stiff, moody, and violent temper; so much so that I remember going once into the attics of my grandfather's house at Penrith, upon some indignity having been put upon me, with an intention of destroying myself with one of the foils which I knew was kept there. I took the foil in hand, but my heart failed. Upon another occasion, while I was at my grandfather's house at Penrith, along with my eldest brother, Richard, we were whipping tops together in the large drawing-room, on which the carpet was only laid down upon particular occasions. The walls were hung round with family pictures, and I said to my brother, 'Dare you strike your whip through that old lady's petticoat?' He replied, 'No, I won't.' 'Then,' said I, 'here goes!' and I struck my lash through her hooped petticoat; for which, no doubt, though I have forgotten it, I was properly punished. But, possibly from some want of judgment in punishments inflicted, I had become perverse and obstinate in defying chastisement, and rather proud of it than otherwise.

"Of my earliest days at school I have little to say, but that they were very happy ones, chiefly because I was left at liberty then, and in the vacations, to read whatever books I liked. For example, I read all Fielding's works, *Don Quixote*, *Gil Blas*, and any part of Swift that I liked—*Gulliver's Travels*, and the *Tale of a Tub*, being both much to my taste. It may be, perhaps, as well to mention that the first verses which I wrote were a task imposed by my master—the subject, *The Summer Vacation;* and of my own accord I added others upon *Return to School.* There was nothing remarkable in either poem; but I was called upon, among other scholars, to write verses upon the completion of the second centenary from the foundation of the school in 1585 by Archbishop Sandys. These verses were much admired—far more than they deserved, for they were but a tame imitation of Pope's versification, and a little in his style."

But it was not from exercises of this kind that Wordsworth's school-days drew their inspiration. No years of his life, perhaps, were richer in strong impressions; but they were impressions derived neither from books nor from companions, but from the majesty and loveliness of the scenes around him;—from Nature, his life-long mistress, loved with the first heats of youth. To her influence we shall again recur; it will be most convenient first to trace Wordsworth's progress through the curriculum of ordinary education.

It was due to the liberality of Wordsworth's two uncles, Richard Wordsworth and Christopher Crackanthorp (under whose care he and his brothers were placed at their father's death, in 1783), that his education was prolonged beyond his school-days.

For Sir James Lowther, afterwards Lord Lonsdale—whose agent Wordsworth's father, Mr. John Wordsworth, was—becoming aware that his agent had about 5000*l.* at the bank, and wishing, partly on political grounds, to make his power over him absolute, had forcibly borrowed this sum of him, and then refused to repay it. After Mr. John Wordsworth's death much of the remaining fortune which he left behind him was wasted in efforts to compel Lord Lonsdale to refund this sum; but it was never recovered till his death in 1801, when his successor repaid 8500*l.* to the Wordsworths, being a full acquittal, with interest, of the original debt. The fortunes of the Wordsworth family were, therefore, at a low ebb in 1787, and much credit is due to the uncles who discerned the talents of William and Christopher, and bestowed a Cambridge education on the future Poet Laureate, and the future Master of Trinity.

In October, 1787, then, Wordsworth went up as an undergraduate to St. John's College, Cambridge. The first court of this College, in the south-western corner of which were Wordsworth's rooms, is divided only by a narrow lane from the Chapel of Trinity College, and his first memories are of the Trinity clock, telling the hours "twice over, with a male and female voice," of the pealing organ, and of the prospect when

> "From my pillow looking forth, by light
> Of moon or favouring stars I could behold
> The antechapel, where the statue stood
> Of Newton with his prism and silent face,
> The marble index of a mind for ever
> Voyaging through strange seas of Thought, alone."

For the most part, the recollections which Wordsworth brought away from Cambridge are such as had already found expression more than once in English literature; for it has been the fortune of that ancient University to receive in her bosom most of that long line of poets who form the peculiar glory of our English speech. Spenser, Ben Jonson, and Marlowe; Dryden, Cowley, and Waller; Milton, George Herbert, and Gray—to mention only the most familiar names—had owed allegiance to that mother who received Wordsworth now, and Coleridge and Byron immediately after him. "Not obvious, not obtrusive, she;" but yet her sober dignity has often seemed no unworthy setting for minds, like Wordsworth's, meditative without languor, and energies advancing without shock or storm. Never, perhaps, has the spirit of Cambridge been more truly caught than in Milton's *Penseroso*; for this poem obviously reflects the seat of learning which the poet had lately left, just as the *Allegro* depicts the cheerful rusticity of the Buckinghamshire village which was his new home. And thus the *Penseroso* was understood by Gray, who, in his *Installation Ode*, introduces Milton among the bards and sages who lean from heaven,

"To bless the place where, on their opening soul
First the genuine ardour stole."

"'Twas Milton struck the deep-toned shell," and invoked with the old affection the scenes which witnessed his best and early years:

"Ye brown o'er-arching groves,
That contemplation loves,
Where willowy Camus lingers with delight!
Oft at the blush of dawn
I trod your level lawn,
Oft wooed the gleam of Cynthia silver-bright
In cloisters dim, far from the haunts of Folly,
With Freedom by my side, and soft-eyed Melancholy."

And Wordsworth also "on the dry smooth-shaven green" paced on solitary evenings "to the far-off curfew's sound," beneath those groves of forest-trees among which "Philomel still deigns a song" and the spirit of contemplation lingers still; whether the silent avenues stand in the summer twilight filled with fragrance of the lime, or the long rows of chestnut engirdle the autumn river-lawns with walls of golden glow, or the tall elms cluster in garden or *Wilderness* into towering citadels of green. Beneath one exquisite ash-tree, wreathed with ivy, and hung in autumn with yellow tassels from every spray, Wordsworth used to linger long. "Scarcely Spenser's self," he tells us,

"Could have more tranquil visions in his youth,
Or could more bright appearances create
Of human forms with superhuman powers,
Than I beheld loitering on calm, clear nights
Alone, beneath this fairy work of earth."

And there was another element in Wordsworth's life at Cambridge more peculiarly his own—that exultation which a boy born among the mountains may feel when he perceives that the delight in the external world which the mountains have taught him has not perished by uprooting, nor waned for want of nourishment in field or fen; that even here, where nature is unadorned, and scenery, as it were, reduced to its elements—where the prospect is but the plain surface of the earth, stretched wide beneath an open heaven—even here he can still feel the early glow, can take delight in that broad and tranquil greenness, and in the august procession of the day.

"As if awakened, summoned, roused, constrained,
I looked for universal things; perused
The common countenance of earth and sky—
Earth, nowhere unembellished by some trace
Of that first Paradise whence man was driven;
And sky, whose beauty and bounty are expressed
By the proud name she bears—the name of Heaven."

Nor is it only in these open air scenes that Wordsworth has added to the long tradition a memory of his own. The "storied windows richly dight;" which have passed into a proverb in Milton's song, cast in King's College Chapel the same "soft chequerings" upon their framework of stone while Wordsworth watched through the pauses of the anthem the winter afternoon's departing glow:—

> "Martyr, or King, or sainted Eremite,
> Whoe'er ye be that thus, yourselves unseen,
> Imbue your prison-bars with solemn sheen,
> Shine on until ye fade with coming Night."

From those shadowy seats whence Milton had heard "the pealing organ blow to the full-voiced choir below," Wordsworth too gazed upon—

> "That branching roof
> Self-poised, and scooped into ten thousand cells
> Where light and shade repose, where music dwells
> Lingering, and wandering on as loth to die—
> Like thoughts whose very sweetness yieldeth proof
> That they were born for immortality."

Thus much, and more, there was of ennobling and unchangeable in the very aspect and structure of that ancient University, by which Wordsworth's mind was bent towards a kindred greatness. But of active moral and intellectual life there was at that time little to be found within her walls. The floodtide of her new life had not yet set in; she was still slumbering, as she had slumbered long, content to add to her majesty by the mere lapse of generations, and increment of her ancestral calm. Even had the intellectual life of the place been more stirring, it is doubtful how far Wordsworth would have been welcomed, or deserved to be welcomed, by authorities or students. He began residence at seventeen, and his northern nature was late to flower. There seems, in fact, to have been even less of visible promise about him than we should have expected: but rather something untamed and insubordinate, something heady and self-confident; an independence that seemed only rusticity, and an indolent ignorance which assumed too readily the tones of scorn. He was as yet a creature of the lakes and mountains, and love for Nature was only slowly leading him to love and reverence for man. Nay, such attraction as he had hitherto felt for the human race had been interwoven with her influence in a way so strange that to many minds it will seem a childish fancy not worth recounting. The objects of his idealization had been Cumbrian shepherds—a race whose personality seems to melt into Nature's—who are united as intimately with moor and mountain as the petrel with the sea.

> "A rambling school-boy, thus
> I felt his presence in his own domain
> As of a lord and master—or a power,
> Or genius, under Nature, under God,

Presiding ; and severest solitude
Had more commanding looks when he was there
When up the lonely brooks on rainy days
Angling I went, or trod the trackless hills
By mists bewildered, suddenly mine eyes
Have glanced upon him distant a few steps,
In size a giant, stalking through thick fog,
His sheep like Greenland bears; or, as he stepped
Beyond the boundary line of some hill-shadow
His form hath flashed upon me, glorified
By the deep radiance of the setting sun;
Or him have I descried in distant sky,
A solitary object and sublime,
Above all height! like an aerial cross
Stationed alone upon a spiry rock
Of the Chartreuse. for worship. Thus was man
Ennobled outwardly before my sight;
And thus my heart was early introduced
To an unconscious love and reverence
Of human nature; hence the human form
To me became an index of delight,
Of grace and honour, power and worthiness."

"This sanctity of Nature given to man"—this interfusion of human interest with the sublimity of moor and hill—formed a typical introduction to the manner in which Wordsworth regarded mankind to the end—depicting him as set, as it were, amid impersonal influences, which make his passion and struggle but a little thing; as when painters give but a strip of their canvas to the fields and cities of men, and overhang the narrowed landscape with the space and serenity of heaven.

To this distant perception of man—of man "purified, removed, and to a distance that was fit"—was added, in his first summer vacation, a somewhat closer interest in the small joys and sorrows of the villagers of Hawkshead—a new sympathy for the old Dame in whose house the poet still lodged, for "the quiet woodman in the woods," and even for the "frank-hearted maids of rocky Cumberland," with whom he delighted to spend an occasional evening in dancing and country mirth. And since the events in this poet's life are for the most part inward and unseen, and depend upon some shock and coincidence between the operations of his spirit and the cosmorama of the external world, he has recorded with especial emphasis a certain sunrise which met him as he walked homewards from one of these scenes of rustic gaiety—a sunrise which may be said to have begun that poetic career which a sunset was to close:

"Ah! need I say, dear Friend, that to the brim
My heart was full; I made no vows, but vows
Were then made for me; bond unknown to me
Was given, that I should be, else sinning greatly,
A dedicated Spirit."

His second long vacation brought him a further gain in human

affections. His sister, of whom he had seen little for some years, was with him once more at Penrith, and with her another maiden,

> "By her exulting outside look of youth
> And placid under-countenance, first endeared;"

whose presence now laid the foundation of a love which was to be renewed and perfected when his need for it was full, and was to be his support and solace to his life's end. His third long vacation he spent in a walking tour in Switzerland. Of this, the commonest relaxation of studious youth, he speaks as of an "unprecedented course," indicating "a hardy slight of college studies and their set rewards." And it seems, indeed, probable that Wordsworth and his friend Jones were actually the first undergraduates who ever spent their summer in this way. The pages of the *Prelude* which narrate this excursion, and especially the description of the crossing of the Simplon—

> "The immeasurable height
> Of woods decaying, never to be decayed"

form one of the most impressive parts of that singular autobiographical poem, which, at first sight so tedious and insipid, seems to gather force and meaning with each fresh perusal. These pages, which carry up to the verge of manhood the story of Wordsworth's career, contain, perhaps, as strong and simple a picture as we shall anywhere find of hardy English youth—its proud self-sufficingness and careless independence of all human things. Excitement, and thought, and joy, seem to come at once at its bidding; and the chequered and struggling existence of adult men seems something which it need never enter, and hardly deigns to comprehend.

Wordsworth and his friend encountered on his tour many a stirring symbol of the expectancy that was running through the nations of Europe. They landed at Calais "on the very eve of that great federal day" when the Trees of Liberty were planted all over France. They met on their return

> "The Brabant armies on the fret
> For battle in the cause of liberty."

But the exulting pulse that ran through the poet's veins could hardly yet pause to sympathise deeply even with what in the world's life appealed most directly to ardent youth.

> "A stripling, scarcely of the household then
> Of social life, I looked upon these things
> As from a distance; heard, and saw, and felt—
> Was touched, but with no intimate concern.
> I seemed to move along them as a bird
> Moves through the air, or as a fish pursues

Its sport or feeds in its proper element.
I wanted not that joy, I did not need
Such help. The ever-living universe,
Turn where I might, was opening out its glories;
And the independent spirit of pure youth
Called forth at every season new delights,
Spread round my steps like sunshine o'er green fields."

CHAPTER II.

RESIDENCE IN LONDON AND IN FRANCE.

WORDSWORTH took his B.A. degree in January, 1791, and quitted Cambridge with no fixed intentions as to his future career. "He did not feel himself," he said long afterwards, "good enough for the Church; he felt that his mind was not properly disciplined for that holy office, and that the struggle between his conscience and his impulses would have made life a torture. He also shrank from the law. He had studied military history with great interest, and the strategy of war; and he always fancied that he had talents for command; and he at one time thought of a military life; but then he was without connexions, and he felt if he were ordered to the West Indies his talents would not save him from the yellow fever, and he gave that up." He therefore repaired to London, and lived there for a time on a small allowance, and with no definite aim. His relations with the great city were of a very slight and external kind. He had few acquaintances, and spent his time mainly in rambling about the streets. His descriptions of this phase of his life have little interest. There is some flatness in an enumeration of the nationalities observable in a London crowd, concluding thus—

> "Malays, Lascars, the Tartar, the Chinese,
> And Negro Ladies in white muslin gowns."

But Wordsworth's limitations were inseparably connected with his strength. And just as the flat scenery of Cambridgeshire had only served to intensify his love for such elements of beauty and grandeur as still were present in sky and fen, even so the bewilderment of London taught him to recognise with an intenser joy such fragments of things rustic, such aspects of things eternal, as were to be found amidst that rush and roar. To the frailer spirit of Hartley Coleridge the weight of London might seem a load impossible to shake off. "And what hath Nature," he plaintively asked—

> "And what hath Nature but the blank void sky
> And the thronged river toiling to the main?"

But Wordsworth saw more than this. He became, as one may say, the poet not of London considered as London, but of London

considered as a part of the country. Like his own *Farmer of Tilsbury Vale*—

> "In the throng of the Town like a Stranger is he,
> Like one whose own Country's far over the sea;
> And Nature, while through the great city he hies,
> Full ten times a day takes his heart by surprise."

Among the poems describing these sudden shocks of vision and memory none is more exquisite than the *Reverie of Poor Susan:*

> "At the corner of Wood Street, when daylight appears,
> Hangs a Thrush that sings loud, it has sung for three years
> Poor Susan has passed by the spot, and has heard
> In the silence of morning the song of the Bird.
>
> "'Tis a note of enchantment; what ails her? She sees
> A mountain ascending, a vision of trees;
> Bright volumes of vapour through Lothbury glide,
> And a river flows on through the vale of Cheapside."

The picture is one of those which come home to many a country heart with one of those sudden "revulsions into the natural" which philosophers assert to be the essence of human joy. But noblest and best known of all these poems is the *Sonnet on Westminster Bridge*, "Earth hath not anything to show more fair;" in which Nature has reasserted her dominion over the works of all the multitude of men; and in the early clearness the poet beholds the great City—as Sterling imagined it on his dying bed—"not as full of noise and dust and confusion, but as something silent, grand, and everlasting." And even in later life, when Wordsworth was often in London, and was welcome in any society, he never lost this external manner of regarding it. He was always of the same mind as the group of listeners in his *Power of Music:*

> "Now, Coaches and Chariots! roar on like a stream!
> Here are twenty Souls happy as souls in a dream:
> They are deaf to your murmurs, they care not for you,
> Nor what ye are flying, nor what ye pursue!"

He never made the attempt—vulgarised by so many a "fashionable novelist," and in which no poet has succeeded yet—to disentangle from that turmoil its elements of romance and of greatness; to enter that realm of emotion where Nature's aspects become the scarcely noted accessory of vicissitudes that transcend her own; to trace the passion or the anguish which whirl along some lurid vista towards a sun that sets in storm, or gaze across silent squares by summer moonlight amid a smell of dust and flowers.

But although Wordsworth passed thus through London unmodified and indifferent, the current of things was sweeping him on to mingle in a fiercer tumult—to be caught in the tides of a more vio-

lent and feverish life. In November, 1791, he landed in France, meaning to pass the winter at Orleans and learn French. Up to this date the French Revolution had impressed him in a rather unusual manner—namely, as being a matter of course. The explanation of this view is a somewhat singular one. Wordsworth's was an old family, and his connexions were some of them wealthy and well placed in the world; but the chances of his education had been such that he could scarcely realise to himself any other than a democratic type of society. Scarcely once, he tells us, in his school days had he seen boy or man who claimed respect on the score of wealth and blood; and the manly atmosphere of Cambridge preserved even in her lowest days a society

> "Where all stood thus far
> Upon equal ground; that we were brothers all
> In honour, as in one community,
> Scholars and gentlemen;"

while the teachings of nature and the dignity of Cumbrian peasant life had confirmed his high opinion of the essential worth of man. The upheaval of the French people, therefore, and the downfall of privilege, seemed to him no portent for good or evil, but rather the tardy return of a society to its stable equilibrium. He passed through revolutionised Paris with satisfaction and sympathy, but with little active emotion, and proceeded first to Orleans, and then to Blois, between which places he spent nearly a year. At Orleans he became intimately acquainted with the nobly-born but republican General Beaupuis, an inspiring example of all in the Revolution that was self-devoted and chivalrous, and had compassion on the wretched poor. In conversation with him Wordsworth learnt with what new force the well-worn adages of the moralist fall from the lips of one who is called upon to put them at once in action, and to stake life itself on the verity of his maxims of honour. The poet's heart burned within him as he listened. He could not, indeed, help mourning sometimes at the sight of a dismantled chapel, or peopling in imagination the forest-glades in which they sat with the chivalry of a by-gone day. But he became increasingly absorbed in his friend's ardour, and the Revolution—*mulier formosa superne*—seemed to him big with all the hopes of man.

He returned to Paris in October, 1792—a month after the massacres of September; and he has described his agitation and dismay at the sight of such world-wide destinies swayed by the hands of such men. In a passage which curiously illustrates that reasoned self-confidence and deliberate boldness which for the most part he showed only in the peaceful incidents of a literary career, he has told us how he was on the point of putting himself forward as a leader of the Girondist party, in the conviction that his single-heartedness of aim would make him, in spite of foreign birth and imperfect speech, a point round which the confused instincts of the multitude might not impossibly rally.

Such a course of action—which, whatever its other results,

would undoubtedly have conducted him to the guillotine with his political friends in May, 1793—was rendered impossible by a somewhat undignified hindrance. Wordsworth, while in his own eyes "a patriot of the world," was in the eyes of others a young man of twenty-two, travelling on a small allowance, and running his head into unnecessary dangers. His funds were stopped, and he reluctantly returned to England at the close of 1792.

And now to Wordsworth, as to many other English patriots, there came, on a great scale, that form of sorrow which in private life is one of the most agonising of all—when two beloved beings, each of them erring greatly, become involved in bitter hate. The new-born Republic flung down to Europe as her battle-gage the head of a king. England, in an hour of horror that was almost panic, accepted the defiance, and war was declared between the two countries early in 1793. "No shock," says Wordsworth,

> Given to my moral nature had I known
> Down to that very moment; neither lapse
> Nor turn of sentiment that might be named
> A revolution, save at this one time;"

and the sound of the evening gun-fire at Portsmouth seemed at once the embodiment and the premonition of England's guilt and woe.

Yet his distracted spirit could find no comfort in the thought of France. For in France the worst came to the worst; and every thing vanished of liberty except the crimes committed in her name.

> Most melancholy at that time, O Friend!
> Were my day-thoughts, my nights were miserable.
> Through months, through years, long after the last beat
> Of those atrocities, the hour of sleep
> To me came rarely charged with natural gifts—
> Such ghastly visions had I of despair,
> And tyranny, and implements of death; . . .
> And levity in dungeons, where the dust
> Was laid with tears. Then suddenly the scene
> Changed, and the unbroken dream entangled me
> In long orations, which I strove to plead
> Before unjust tribunals—with a voice
> Labouring, a brain confounded, and a sense,
> Death-like, of treacherous desertion, felt
> In the last place of refuge—my own soul."

These years of perplexity and disappointment, following on a season of overstrained and violent hopes, were the sharpest trial through which Wordsworth ever passed. The course of affairs in France, indeed, was such as seemed by an irony of fate to drive the noblest and firmest hearts into the worst aberrations. For first of all in that Revolution, Reason had appeared, as it were, in visible shape, and hand in hand with Pity and Virtue; then, as the welfare of the oppressed peasantry began to be lost sight of amid the brawls of the factions of Paris, all that was attractive and en-

thusiastic in the great movement seemed to disappear, but yet Reason might still be thought to find a closer realization here than among scenes more serene and fair; and, lastly, Reason set in blood and tyranny, and there was no more hope from France. But those who, like Wordsworth, had been taught by that great convulsion to disdain the fetters of sentiment and tradition, and to look on Reason as supreme, were not willing to relinquish their belief because violence had conquered her in one more battle. Rather they clung with the greater tenacity—"adhered," in Wordsworth's words,

> "More firmly to old tenets, and to prove
> Their temper, strained them more;"

cast off more decisively than ever the influences of tradition, and in their Utopian visions even wished to see the perfected race severed in its perfection from the memories of humanity, and from kinship with the struggling past.

Through a mood of this kind Wordsworth had to travel now. And his nature, formed for pervading attachments and steady memories, suffered grievously from the privation of much which even the coldest and calmest temper cannot forego without detriment and pain. For it is not with impunity that men commit themselves to the sole guidance of either of the two great elements of their being. The penalties of trusting to the emotions alone are notorious; and every day affords some instance of a character that has degenerated into a bundle of impulses, of a will that has become caprice. But the consequences of making Reason our tyrant instead of our king are almost equally disastrous. There is so little which Reason, divested of all emotional or instinctive supports, is able to prove to our satisfaction that a sceptical aridity is likely to take possession of the soul. It was thus with Wordsworth; he was driven to a perpetual questioning of all beliefs and analysis of all motives—

> "Till, demanding formal proof,
> And seeking it in everything, I lost
> All feeling of conviction; and, in fine,
> Sick, wearied out with contrarieties,
> Yielded up moral questions in despair."

In this mood all those great generalised conceptions which are the food of our love, our reverence, our religion, dissolve away; and Wordsworth tells us that at this time

> "Even the visible universe
> Fell under the dominion of a taste
> Less spiritual, with microscopic view
> Was scanned, as I had scanned the moral world."

He looked on the operations of nature "in disconnection dull and spiritless;" he could no longer apprehend her unity nor feel her

charm. He retained, indeed, his craving for natural beauty, but in an uneasy and fastidious mood—

> "Giving way
> To a comparison of scene with scene,
> Bent overmuch on superficial things,
> Pampering myself with meagre novelties
> Of colour and proportion; to the moods
> Of time and season, to the moral power,
> The affections, and the spirit of the place,
> Insensible."

Such cold fits are common to all religions; they haunt the artist, the philanthropist, the philosopher, the saint. Often, they are due to some strain of egoism or ambition which has intermixed itself with the impersonal desire; sometimes, as in Wordsworth's case, to the persistent tension of a mind which has been bent too ardently towards an ideal scarce possible to man. And in this case, when the objects of a man's habitual admiration are true and noble, they will ever be found to suggest some antidote to the fatigues of their pursuit. We shall see as we proceed how a deepening insight into the lives of the peasantry around him—the happiness and virtue of simple Cumbrian homes—restored to the poet a serener confidence in human nature, amid all the shame and downfall of such hopes in France. And that still profounder loss of delight in Nature herself—that viewing of all things "in disconnection dull and spiritless," which, as it has been well said, is the truest definition of Atheism, inasmuch as a unity in the universe is the first element in our conception of God—this dark pathway also was not without its outlet into the day. For the God in Nature is not only a God of Beauty, but a God of Law; his unity can be apprehended in power as well as in glory; and Wordsworth's mind, "sinking inward upon itself from thought to thought," found rest for the time in that austere religion—Hebrew at once and scientific, common to a Newton and a Job—which is fostered by the prolonged contemplation of the mere Order of the sum of things.

> "Not in vain
> I had been taught to reverence a Power
> That is the visible quality and shape
> And image of right reason."

Not, indeed, in vain! For he felt now that there is no side of truth, however remote from human interests, no aspect of the universe, however awful and impersonal, which may not have power at some season to guide and support the spirit of man. When Goodness is obscured, when Beauty wearies, there are some souls which still can cling and grapple to the conception of eternal Law.

Of such stern consolations the poet speaks as having restored him in his hour of need. But he gratefully acknowledges also another solace of a gentler kind. It was about this time (1795)

that Wordsworth was blessed with the permanent companionship of his sister, to whom he was tenderly attached, but whom, since childhood, he had seen only at long intervals. Miss Wordsworth, after her father's death, had lived mainly with her maternal grandfather, Mr. Cookson, at Penrith; occasionally at Halifax with other relations; or at Forncett with her uncle, Dr. Cookson, Canon of Windsor. She was now able to join her favourite brother; and in this gifted woman Wordsworth found a gentler and sunnier likeness of himself; he found a love which never wearied, and a sympathy fervid without blindness, whose suggestions lay so directly in his mind's natural course that they seemed to spring from the same individuality, and to form at once a portion of his inmost being. The opening of this new era of domestic happiness demands a separate chapter.

CHAPTER III.

MISS WORDSWORTH.—LYRICAL BALLADS.—SETTLEMENT AT GRASMERE.

FROM among many letters of Miss Wordsworth's to a beloved friend (Miss Jane Pollard, afterwards Mrs. Marshall, of Hallsteads), which have been kindly placed at my disposal, I may without impropriety quote a few passages which illustrate the character and the affection of brother and sister alike. And first, in a letter (Forncett, February, 1792), comparing her brothers Christopher and William, she says: "Christopher is steady and sincere in his attachments. William has both these virtues in an eminent degree, and a sort of violence of affection, if I may so term it, which demonstrates itself every moment of the day, when the objects of his affection are present with him, in a thousand almost imperceptible attentions to their wishes, in a sort of restless watchfulness which I know not how to describe, a tenderness that never sleeps, and at the same time such a delicacy of manner as I have observed in few men." And again (Forncett, June, 1793), she writes to the same friend: "I have strolled into a neighbouring meadow, where I am enjoying the melody of birds, and the busy sounds of a fine summer's evening. But oh! how imperfect is my pleasure whilst I am alone! Why are you not seated with me? and my dear William, why is he not here also? I could almost fancy that I see you both near me. I hear *you* point out a spot, where, if we could erect a little cottage and call it our own, we should be the happiest of human beings. I see my brother fired with the idea of leading his sister to such a retreat. Our parlour is in a moment furnished, our garden is adorned by magic; the roses and honeysuckles spring at our command; the wood behind the house lifts its head, and furnishes us with a winter's shelter and a summer's noonday shade. My dear friend, I trust that erelong you will be, without the aid of imagination, the companion of my walks, and my dear William may be of our party. . . . He is now going upon a tour in the west of England, with a gentleman who was formerly a schoolfellow—a man of fortune, who is to bear all the expenses of the journey, and only requests the favour of William's company. He is perfectly at liberty to quit this companion as soon as anything more advantageous offers. But it is enough to say that I am likely to have the happiness of introducing you to my beloved brother. You

must forgive me for talking so much of him; my affection hurries me on, and makes me forget that you cannot be so much interested in the subject as I am. You do not know him; you do not know how amiable he is. Perhaps you reply, 'But I know how blinded you are.' Well, my dearest, I plead guilty at once; I *must* be blind; he cannot be so pleasing as my fondness makes him. I am willing to allow that half the virtues with which I fancy him endowed are the creation of my love; but surely I may be excused! He was never tired of comforting his sister; he never left her in anger; he always met her with joy; he preferred her society to every other pleasure—or rather, when we were so happy as to be within each other's reach, he had no pleasure when we were compelled to be divided. Do not, then, expect too much from this brother of whom I have delighted so to talk to you. In the first place, you must be with him more than once before he will be perfectly easy in conversation. In the second place, his person is not in his favour—at least I should think not; but I soon ceased to discover this—nay, I almost thought that the opinion which I had formed was erroneous. He is, however, certainly rather plain, though otherwise has an extremely thoughtful countenance; but when he speaks it is often lighted up by a smile which I think very pleasing. But enough, he is my brother; why should I describe him? I shall be launching again into panegyric."

The brother's language to his sister is equally affectionate. "How much do I wish," he writes in 1793, "that each emotion of pleasure or pain that visits your heart should excite a similar pleasure or a similar pain within me, by that sympathy which will almost identify us when we have stolen to our little cottage. . . . I will write to my uncle, and tell him that I cannot think of going anywhere before I have been with you. Whatever answer he gives me, I certainly will make a point of once more mingling my transports with yours. Alas! my dear sister, how soon must this happiness expire; yet there are moments worth ages."

And again, in the same year, he writes, "Oh, my dear, dear sister! with what transport shall I again meet you! with what rapture shall I again wear out the day in your sight! . . . I see you in a moment running, or rather flying, to my arms."

Wordsworth was in all things fortunate, but in nothing more fortunate than in this, that so unique a companion should have been ready to devote herself to him with an affection wholly free from egoism or jealousy—an affection that yearned only to satisfy his subtlest needs, and to transfuse all that was best in herself into his larger being. And, indeed, that fortunate admixture or influence, whencesoever derived, which raised the race of Wordsworth to poetic fame, was almost more dominant and conspicuous in Dorothy Wordsworth than in the poet himself. "The shooting lights of her wild eyes" reflected to the full the strain of imaginative emotion which was mingled in the poet's nature with that spirit of steadfast and conservative virtue which has already given to the family a Master of Trinity, two Bishops, and other divines and

scholars of weight and consideration. In the poet himself the conservative and ecclesiastical tendencies of his character became more and more apparent as advancing years stiffened the movements of the mind. In his sister the ardent element was less restrained; it showed itself in a most innocent direction, but it brought with it a heavy punishment. Her passion for nature and her affection for her brother led her into mountain rambles which were beyond her strength, and her last years were spent in a condition of physical and mental decay.

But at the time of which we are now speaking there was, perhaps, no one in the world who could have been to the poet such a companion as his sister became. She had not, of course, his grasp of mind or his poetic power; but her sensitiveness to nature was quite as keen as his, and her disposition resembled his "with sunshine added to daylight."

> "Birds in the bower, and lambs in the green field,
> Could they have known her, would have loved; methought
> Her very presence such a sweetness breathed,
> That flowers, and trees, and even the silent hills,
> And everything she looked on, should have had
> An intimation how she bore herself
> Towards them, and to all creatures."

Her journal of a tour in Scotland, and her description of a week on Ullswater, affixed to Wordsworth's *Guide to the Lakes*—diaries not written for publication, but merely to communicate her own delight to intimate friends at a distance—are surely indescribably attractive in their naïve and tender feeling, combined with a delicacy of insight into natural beauty which was almost a new thing in the history of the world. If we compare, for instance, any of her descriptions of the Lakes with Southey's, we see the difference between mere literary skill, which can now be rivalled in many quarters, and that sympathetic intuition which comes of love alone. Even if we compare her with Gray, whose short notice of Cumberland bears on every page the stamp of a true poet, we are struck by the way in which Miss Wordsworth's tenderness for all living things gives character and pathos to her landscapes, and evokes from the wildest solitude some note that thrills the heart.

> "She gave me eyes, she gave me ears,
> And humble cares, and delicate fears;
> A heart the fountain of sweet tears;
> And love, and thought, and joy."

The cottage life in her brother's company, which we have seen Miss Wordsworth picturing to herself with girlish ardour, was destined to be realised no long time afterwards, thanks to the unlooked-for outcome of another friendship. If the poet's sister was his first admirer, Raisley Calvert may fairly claim the second place. Calvert was the son of the steward of the Duke of Norfolk, who

possessed large estates in Cumberland. He attached himself to Wordsworth, and in 1793 and 1794 the friends were much together. Calvert was then attacked by consumption, and Wordsworth nursed him with patient care. It was found at his death that he had left his friend a legacy of 900*l.* "The act," says Wordsworth, "was done entirely from a confidence on his part that I had powers and attainments which might be of use to mankind. Upon the interest of the 900*l.*—400*l.* being laid out in an annuity—with 200*l.* deducted from the principal, and 100*l.* a legacy to my sister, and 100*l.* more which the *Lyrical Ballads* have brought me, my sister and I contrived to live seven years, nearly eight."

Trusting in this small capital, and with nothing to look to in the future except the uncertain prospect of the payment of Lord Lonsdale's debt to the family, Wordsworth settled with his sister at Racedown, near Crewkere, in Dorsetshire, in the autumn of 1795, the choice of this locality being apparently determined by the offer of a cottage on easy terms. Here, in the first home which he had possessed, Wordsworth's steady devotion to poetry began. He had already, in 1792,* published two little poems, the *Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches*, which Miss Wordsworth (to whom the *Evening Walk* was addressed) criticises with candour in a letter to the same friend (Forncett, February, 1792):

"The scenes which he describes have been viewed with a poet's eye, and are portrayed with a poet's pencil; and the poem contains many passages exquisitely beautiful; but they also contain many faults, the chief of which are obscurity and a too frequent use of some particular expressions and uncommon words; for instance, *moveless*, which he applies in a sense, if not new, at least different from its ordinary one. By 'moveless,' when applied to the swan, he means that sort of motion which is smooth without agitation; it is a very beautiful epithet, but ought to have been cautiously used. The word *viewless* also is introduced far too often. I regret exceedingly that he did not submit the works to the inspection of some friend before their publication, and he also joins with me in this regret."

These poems show a careful and minute observation of nature, but their versification—still reminding us of the imitators of Pope—has little originality or charm. They attracted the admiration of Coleridge, but had no further success.

At Racedown Wordsworth finished *Guilt and Sorrow*, a poem gloomy in tone and written mainly in his period of depression and unrest; and wrote a tragedy called *The Borderers*, of which only a few lines show any promise of future excellence. He then wrote *The Ruined Cottage*, now incorporated in the First Book of the *Excursion*. This poem, on a subject thoroughly suited to his powers, was his first work of merit; and Coleridge, who visited the quiet household in June, 1797, pronounces this poem "superior, I hesitate not to aver, to anything in our language which in any way resem-

* The *Memoirs* say in 1793, but the following MS. letter of 1792 speaks of them as already published.

bles it." In July, 1797, the Wordsworths removed to Alfoxden, a large house in Somersetshire, near Netherstowey, where Coleridge was at that time living. Here Wordsworth added to his income by taking as pupil a young boy, the hero of the trifling poem *Anecdote for Fathers*, a son of Mr. Basil Montagu; and here he composed many of his smaller pieces. He has described the origin of the *Ancient Mariner* and the *Lyrical Ballads* in a well-known passage, part of which I must here repeat:

"In the autumn of 1797, Mr. Coleridge, my sister, and myself started from Alfoxden pretty late in the afternoon, with a view to visit Linton, and the Valley of Stones near to it; and as our united funds were very small, we agreed to defray the expense of the tour by writing a poem, to be sent to the *New Monthly Magazine*. In the course of this walk was planned the poem of the *Ancient Mariner*, founded on a dream, as Mr. Coleridge said, of his friend Mr. Cruikshank. Much the greatest part of the story was Mr. Coleridge's invention; but certain parts I suggested: for example, some crime was to be committed which was to bring upon the Old Navigator, as Coleridge afterwards delighted to call him, the spectral persecution, as a consequence of that crime and his own wanderings. I had been reading in Shelvocke's *Voyages*, a day or two before, that while doubling Cape Horn they frequently saw albatrosses in that latitude, the largest sort of sea-fowl, some extending their wings twelve or thirteen feet. 'Suppose,' said I, 'you represent him as having killed one of these birds on entering the South Sea, and that the tutelary spirits of these regions take upon them to avenge the crime.' The incident was thought fit for the purpose, and adopted accordingly. I also suggested the navigation of the ship by the dead man, but do not recollect that I had anything more to do with the scheme of the poem. We began the composition together, on that to me memorable evening. I furnished two or three lines at the beginning of the poem, in particular—

'And listened like a three years' child;
The Mariner had his will.'

As we endeavoured to proceed conjointly our respective manners proved so widely different, that it would have been quite presumptuous in me to do anything but separate from an undertaking upon which I could only have been a clog. The *Ancient Mariner* grew and grew, till it became too important for our first object, which was limited to our expectation of five pounds; and we began to think of a volume, which was to consist, as Mr. Coleridge has told the world, of poems chiefly on supernatural subjects, taken from common life, but looked at, as much as might be, through an imaginative medium."

The volume of *Lyrical Ballads*, whose first beginnings have here been traced, was published in the autumn of 1798, by Mr. Cottle, at Bristol. This volume contained several poems which have been justly blamed for triviality—as *The Thorn*, *Goody Blake*, *The Idiot Boy;* several in which, as in *Simon Lee*, triviality is mingled with much real pathos; and some, as *Expostulation and Reply* and *The Tables Turned*, which are of the very essence of Wordsworth's nature. It is hardly too much to say that, if these

two last-named poems—to the careless eye so slight and trifling—were all that had remained from Wordsworth's hand, they would have "spoken to the comprehending" of a new individuality, as distinct and unmistakable in its way as that which Sappho has left engraven on the world forever in words even fewer than these. And the volume ended with a poem which Wordsworth composed in 1798, in one day, during a tour with his sister to Tintern and Chepstow. The *Lines written above Tintern Abbey* have become, as it were, the *locus classicus*, or consecrated formulary of the Wordsworthian faith. They say in brief what it is the work of the poet's biographer to say in detail.

As soon as this volume was published Wordsworth and his sister sailed for Hamburg, in the hope that their imperfect acquaintance with the German language might be improved by the heroic remedy of a winter at Goslar. But at Goslar they do not seem to have made any acquaintances, and their self-improvement consisted mainly in reading German books to themselves. The four months spent at Goslar, however, were the very bloom of Wordsworth's poetic career. Through none of his poems has the peculiar loveliness of English scenery and English girlhood shone more delicately than through those which came to him as he paced the frozen gardens of that desolate city. Here it was that he wrote *Lucy Gray*, and *Ruth*, and *Nutting*, and the *Poet's Epitaph*, and other poems known now to most men as possessing in its full fragrance his especial charm. And here it was that the memory of some emotion prompted the lines on *Lucy*. Of the history of that emotion he has told us nothing; I forbear, therefore, to inquire concerning it, or even to speculate. That it was to the poet's honour, I do not doubt; but who ever learned such secrets rightly? or who should wish to learn? It is best to leave the sanctuary of all hearts inviolate, and to respect the reserve not only of the living but of the dead. Of these poems, almost alone, Wordsworth in his autobiographical notes has said nothing whatever. One of them he suppressed for years, and printed only in a later volume. One can, indeed, well imagine that there may be poems which a man may be willing to give to the world only in the hope that their pathos will be, as it were, protected by its own intensity, and that those who are worthiest to comprehend will be least disposed to discuss them.

The autobiographical notes on his own works above alluded to were dictated by the poet to his friend Miss Isabella Fenwick, at her urgent request, in 1843, and preserve many interesting particulars as to the circumstances under which each poem was composed. They are to be found printed entire among Wordsworth's prose works, and I shall therefore cite them only occasionally. Of *Lucy Gray*, for instance, he says—

"It was founded on a circumstance told me by my sister, of a little girl who, not far from Halifax, in Yorkshire, was bewildered in a snow-storm. Her footsteps were tracked by her parents to the middle of the

lock of a canal, and no other vestige of her, backward or forward, could be traced. The body, however, was found in the canal. The way in which the incident was treated, and the spiritualising of the character, might furnish hints for contrasting the imaginative influence which I have endeavoured to throw over common life, with Crabbe's matter-of-fact style of handling subjects of the same kind."

And of the *Lines written in Germany*, 1798–99—

"A bitter winter it was when these verses were composed by the side of my sister, in our lodgings, at a draper's house, in the romantic imperial town of Goslar, on the edge of the Hartz forest. So severe was the cold of this winter that, when we passed out of the parlour warmed by the stove, our cheeks were struck by the air as by cold iron. I slept in a room over a passage that was not ceiled. The people of the house used to say, rather unfeelingly, that they expected I should be frozen to death some night; but with the protection of a pelisse lined with fur, and a dog's-skin bonnet, such as was worn by the peasants, I walked daily on the ramparts or on a sort of public ground or garden, in which was a pond. Here I had no companion but a kingfisher, a beautiful creature that used to glance by me. I consequently became much attached to it. During these walks I composed *The Poet's Epitaph*."

Seldom has there been a more impressive instance of the contrast, familiar to biographers, between the apparent insignificance and the real importance of their hero in undistinguished youth. To any one considering Wordsworth as he then was—a rough and somewhat stubborn young man, who, in nearly thirty years of life, had seemed alternately to idle without grace and to study without advantage—it might well have seemed incredible that he could have anything new or valuable to communicate to mankind. Where had been his experience? or where was the indication of that wealth of sensuous emotion which in such a nature as Keats's seems almost to dispense with experience, and to give novelty by giving vividness to such passions as are known to all? If Wordsworth were to impress mankind it must be, one might have thought, by travelling out of himself altogether—by revealing some such energy of imagination as can create a world of romance and adventure in the shyest heart. But this was not so to be. Already Wordsworth's minor poems had dealt most entirely with his own feelings, and with the objects actually before his eyes; and it was at Goslar that he planned, and on the day of his quitting Goslar that he began, a much longer poem, whose subject was to be still more intimately personal, being the development of his own mind. This poem, dedicated to Coleridge, and written in the form of a confidence bestowed on an intimate friend, was finished in 1805, but was not published till after the poet's death Mrs. Wordsworth then named it *The Prelude*, indicating thus the relation which it bears to the *Excursion*—or, rather, to the projected poem of the *Recluse*, of which the *Excursion* was to form only the Second out of three Divisions. One Book of the First Division of the *Recluse* was written, but is yet unpublished; the Third Division was never even

begun, and "the materials," we are told, "of which it would have been formed have been incorporated, for the most part, in the author's other publications." Nor need this change of plan be regretted: didactic poems admit easily of mutilation; and all that can be called plot in this series of works is contained in the *Prelude*, in which we see Wordsworth arriving at those convictions which in the *Excursion* he pauses to expound.

It would be too much to say that Wordsworth has been wholly successful in the attempt—for such the *Prelude* virtually is—to write an epic poem on his own education. Such a poem must almost necessarily appear tedious and egoistic, and Wordsworth's manner has not tact enough to prevent these defects from being felt to the full. On the contrary, in his constant desire frugally to extract, as it were, its full teaching from the minutest event which has befallen him, he supplements the self-complacency of the autobiographer with the conscientious exactness of the moralist, and is apt to insist on trifles such as lodge in the corners of every man's memory, as if they were unique lessons vouchsafed to himself alone.

Yet it follows from this very temper of mind that there is scarcely any autobiography which we can read with such implicit confidence as the *Prelude*. In the case of this, as of so many of Wordsworth's productions, our first dissatisfaction at the form which the poem assumes yields to a recognition of its fitness to express precisely what the poet intends. Nor are there many men who, in recounting the story of their own lives, could combine a candour so absolute with so much of dignity; who could treat their personal history so impartially as a means of conveying lessons of general truth; or who, while chronicling such small things, could remain so great. The *Prelude* is a book of good augury for human nature. We feel in reading it as if the stock of mankind were sound. The soul seems going on from strength to strength by the mere development of her inborn power. And the scene with which the poem at once opens and concludes—the return to the Lake country as to a permanent and satisfying home—places the poet at last amid his true surroundings, and leaves us to contemplate him as completed by a harmony without him, which he of all men most needed to evoke the harmony within.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ENGLISH LAKES.

THE lakes and mountains of Cumberland, Westmoreland, and Lancashire are singularly fitted to supply such elements of moral sustenance as nature's aspects can afford to man. There are, indeed, many mountain regions of greater awfulness; but prospects of ice and terror should be a rare stimulant rather than an habitual food; and the physical difficulties inseparable from immense elevations depress the inhabitant and preoccupy the traveller. There are many lakes under a more lustrous sky: but the healthy activities of life demand a scene brilliant without languor, and a beauty which can refresh and satisfy rather than lull or overpower. Without advancing any untenable claim to British pre-eminence in the matter of scenery, we may, perhaps, follow on both these points the judgment which Wordsworth has expressed in his *Guide to the Lakes*, a work which condenses the results of many years of intimate observation.

"Our tracts of wood and water," he says, "are almost diminutive in comparison (with Switzerland); therefore, as far as sublimity is dependent upon absolute bulk and height, and atmospherical influences in connexion with these, it is obvious that there can be no rivalship. But a short residence among the British mountains will furnish abundant proof that, after a certain point of elevation, viz., that which allows of compact and fleecy clouds settling upon, or sweeping over, the summits, the sense of sublimity depends more upon form and relation of objects to each other than upon their actual magnitude; and that an elevation of 3000 feet is sufficient to call forth in a most impressive degree the creative, and magnifying, and softening powers of the atmosphere."

And again, as to climate: "The rain," he says, "here comes down heartily, and is frequently succeeded by clear bright weather, when every brook is vocal, and every torrent sonorous; brooks and torrents which are never muddy even in the heaviest floods. Days of unsettled weather, with partial showers, are very frequent; but the showers, darkening or brightening as they fly from hill to hill, are not less grateful to the eye than finely interwoven passages of gay and sad music are touching to the ear. Vapours, exhaling from the lakes and meadows after sunrise in a hot season or in moist weather brooding upon the heights, or descending tow-

ards the valleys with inaudible motion, give a visionary character to everything around them; and are in themselves so beautiful as to dispose us to enter into the feelings of those simple nations (such as the Laplanders of this day) by whom they are taken for guardian deities of the mountains; or to sympathise with others who have fancied these delicate apparitions to be the spirits of their departed ancestors. Akin to these are fleecy clouds resting upon the hill-tops; they are not easily managed in picture, with their accompaniments of blue sky, but how glorious are they in nature! how pregnant with imagination for the poet! And the height of the Cumbrian mountains is sufficient to exhibit daily and hourly instances of those mysterious attachments. Such clouds, cleaving to their stations, or lifting up suddenly their glittering heads from behind rocky barriers, or hurrying out of sight with speed of the sharpest edge, will often tempt an inhabitant to congratulate himself on belonging to a country of mists and clouds and storms, and make him think of the blank sky of Egypt, and of the cerulean vacancy of Italy, as an unanimated and even a sad spectacle."

The consciousness of a preceding turmoil brings home to us best the sense of perfect peace; and a climate accustomed to storm-cloud and tempest can melt sometimes into "a day as still as heaven," with a benignant tranquillity which calmer regions can scarcely know. Such a day Wordsworth has described in language of such delicate truth and beauty as only a long and intimate love can inspire:

"It has been said that in human life there are moments worth ages. In a more subdued tone of sympathy may we affirm, that in the climate of England there are, for the lover of nature, days which are worth whole months, I might say, even years. One of these favoured days sometimes occurs in spring-time, when that soft air is breathing over the blossoms and new-born verdure which inspired Buchanan with his beautiful Ode to the First of May; the air which, in the luxuriance of his fancy, he likens to that of the golden age—to that which gives motion to the funereal cypresses on the banks of Lethe; to the air which is to salute beatified spirits when expiatory fires shall have consumed the earth with all her habitations. But it is in autumn that days of such affecting influence most frequently intervene. The atmosphere seems refined, and the sky rendered more crystalline, as the vivifying heat of the year abates; the lights and shadows are more delicate; the colouring is richer and more finely harmonised; and, in this season of stillness, the ear being unoccupied, or only gently excited, the sense of vision becomes more susceptible of its appropriate enjoyments. A resident in a country like this which we are treating of will agree with me that the presence of a lake is indispensable to exhibit in perfection the beauty of one of these days; and he must have experienced, while looking on the unruffled waters, that the imagination by their aid is carried into recesses of feeling otherwise impenetrable. The reason of this is, that the heavens are not only brought down into the bosom of the earth, but that the earth is mainly looked at, and thought of, through the medium of a purer element. The happiest time is when the equinoctial gales are departed; but their fury may probably be called to mind by the sight of a few shattered boughs, whose

leaves do not differ in colour from the faded foliage of the stately oaks from which these relics of the storm depend: all else speaks of tranquillity: not a breath of air, no restlessness of insects, and not a moving object perceptible—except the clouds gliding in the depths of the lake, or the traveller passing along, an inverted image, whose motion seems governed by the quiet of a time to which its archetype, the living person, is perhaps insensible; or it may happen that the figure of one of the larger birds, a raven or a heron, is crossing silently among the reflected clouds, while the voice of the real bird, from the element aloft, gently awakens in the spectator the recollection of appetites and instincts, pursuits and occupations, that deform and agitate the world, yet have no power to prevent nature from putting on an aspect capable of satisfying the most intense cravings for the tranquil, the lovely, and the perfect to which man, the noblest of her creatures, is subject."

The scene described here is one as exquisite in detail as majestic in general effect. And it is characteristic of the region in which Wordsworth's love was given that there is no corner of it without a meaning and a charm; that the open record of its immemorial past tells us at every turn that all agencies have conspired for loveliness and ruin itself has been benign. A passage of Wordsworth's describing the character of the lake-shores illustrates this fact with loving minuteness:

"Sublimity is the result of nature's first great dealings with the superficies of the Earth; but the general tendency of her subsequent operations is towards the production of beauty, by a multiplicity of symmetrical parts uniting in a consistent whole. This is everywhere exemplified along the margins of these lakes. Masses of rock, that have been precipitated from the heights into the area of waters, lie in some places like stranded ships, or have acquired the compact structure of jutting piers, or project in little peninsulas crested with native wood. The smallest rivulet, one whose silent influx is scarcely noticeable in a season of dry weather, so faint is the dimple made by it on the smooth surface of the lake, will be found to have been not useless in shaping, by its deposits of gravel and soil in time of flood, a curve that would not otherwise have existed. But the more powerful brooks, encroaching upon the level of the lake, have, in course of time, given birth to ample promontories of sweeping outline, that contrast boldly with the longitudinal base of the steeps on the opposite shore; while their flat or gently-sloping surfaces never fail to introduce, into the midst of desolation and barrenness, the elements of fertility, even where the habitations of men may not have been raised."

With this we may contrast, as a companion picture, the poet's description of the tarns, or lonely bodies of water, which lie here and there among the hills:

"They are difficult of access and naked; yet some of them are, in their permanent forms, very grand, and there are accidents of things which would make the meanest of them interesting. At all events, one of these pools is an acceptable sight to the mountain wanderer, not merely as an incident that diversifies the prospect, but as forming in his mind a centre or conspicuous point to which objects, otherwise disconnected or insubordinated, may be referred. Some few have a varied outline, with bold

heath-clad promontories; and as they mostly lie at the foot of a steep precipice, the water, where the sun is not shining upon it, appears black and sullen, and round the margin huge stones and masses of rock are scattered, some defying conjecture as to the means by which they came thither, and others obviously fallen from on high, the contribution of ages. A not unpleasing sadness is induced by this perplexity and these images of decay; while the prospect of a body of pure water, unattended with groves and other cheerful rural images by which fresh water is usually accompanied, and unable to give furtherance to the meagre vegetation around it, excites a sense of some repulsive power strongly put forth, and thus deepens the melancholy natural to such scenes."

To those who love to deduce the character of a population from the character of their race and surroundings the peasantry of Cumberland and Westmoreland form an attractive theme. Drawn in great part from the strong Scandinavian stock, they dwell in a land solemn and beautiful as Norway itself, but without Norway's rigour and penury, and with still lakes and happy rivers instead of Norway's inarming melancholy sea. They are a mountain folk; but their mountains are no precipices of insuperable snow, such as keep the dwellers in some Swiss hamlet shut in ignorance and stagnating into idiocy. These barriers divide only to concentrate, and environ only to endear; their guardianship is but enough to give an added unity to each group of kindred homes. And thus it is that the Cumbrian dalesmen have afforded perhaps as near a realisation as human facts have yet allowed of the rural society which statesmen desire for their country's greatness. They have given an example of substantial comfort strenuously won: of home affections intensified by independent strength; of isolation without ignorance, and of a shrewd simplicity; of an hereditary virtue which needs no support from fanaticism, and to which honour is more than law.

The school of political economists, moreover, who urge the advantage of a peasant proprietary, of small independent holdings—as at once drawing from the land the fullest produce and rearing upon it the most vigorous and provident population—this school, as is well known, finds in the *statesmen* of Cumberland one of its favourite examples. In the days of border-wars, when the first object was to secure the existence of as many armed men as possible, in readiness to repel the Scot, the abbeys and great proprietors in the north readily granted small estates on military tenure, which tenure, when personal service in the field was no longer needed, became in most cases an absolute ownership. The attachment of these *statesmen* to their hereditary estates, the heroic efforts which they would make to avoid parting with them, formed an impressive phenomenon in the little world—a world at once of equality and of conservatism—which was the scene of Wordsworth's childish years, and which remained his manhood's ideal.

The growth of large fortunes in England, and the increased competition for land, has swallowed up many of these small independent holdings in the extensive properties of wealthy men. And

at the same time the spread of education, and the improved poor-laws and other legislation, by raising the condition of other parts of England, have tended to obliterate the contrast which was so marked in Wordsworth's day. How marked that contrast was, a comparison of Crabbe's poems with Wordsworth's will sufficiently indicate. Both are true painters; but while in the one we see poverty as something gross and degrading, and the *Tales of the Village* stand out from a background of pauperism and crime; in the other picture poverty means nothing worse than privation, and the poet in the presence of the most tragic outcast of fortune could still

> "Have laughed himself to scorn to find
> In that decrepit man so firm a mind."

Nay, even when a state far below the *Leech-Gatherer's* has been reached, and mind and body alike are in their last decay, the life of the *Old Cumberland Beggar*, at one remove from nothingness, has yet a dignity and a usefulness of its own. His fading days are passed in no sad asylum of vicious or gloomy age, but amid neighbourly kindnesses, and in the sanity of the open air; and a life that is reduced to its barest elements has yet a hold on the liberality of nature and the affections of human hearts.

So long as the inhabitants of a region so solitary and beautiful have neither many arts nor many wishes, save such as the nature which they know has suggested, and their own handiwork can satisfy, so long are their presence and habitations likely to be in harmony with the scenes around them. Nay, man's presence is almost always needed to draw out the full meaning of Nature, to illustrate her bounty by his glad well-being, and to hint by his contrivances of precaution at her might and terror. Wordsworth's description of the cottages of Cumberland depicts this unconscious adaptation of man's abode to his surroundings, with an eye which may be called at pleasure that of painter or of poet.

"The dwelling-houses and contiguous out-houses are in many instances of the colour of the native rock out of which they have been built; but frequently the dwelling—or Fire-house, as it is ordinarily called—has been distinguished from the barn or byre by roughcast and whitewash, which, as the inhabitants are not hasty in renewing it, in a few years acquires by the influence of weather a tint at once sober and variegated. As these houses have been, from father to son, inhabited by persons engaged in the same occupations, yet necessarily with changes in their circumstances, they have received without incongruity additions and accommodations adapted to the needs of each successive occupant, who being for the most part proprietor, was at liberty to follow his own fancy, so that these humble dwellings remind the contemplative spectator of a production of nature, and may (using a strong expression) rather be said to have grown than to have been erected—to have risen, by an instinct of their own, out of the native rock—so little is there in them of formality, such is their wildness and beauty.

"These dwellings, mostly built, as has been said, of rough unhewn stone, are roofed with slates, which were rudely taken from the quarry

before the present art of splitting them was understood, and are therefore rough and uneven in their surface, so that both the coverings and sides of the houses have furnished places of rest for the seeds of lichens, mosses, ferns, and flowers. Hence buildings, which in their very form call to mind the processes of nature, do thus, clothed in part with a vegetable garb, appear to be received into the bosom of the living principle of things, as it acts and exists among the woods and fields, and by their colour and their shape affectingly direct the thoughts to that tranquil course of nature and simplicity along which the humble-minded inhabitants have through so many generations been led. Add the little garden with its shed for bee-hives, its small bed of potherbs, and its borders and patches of flowers for Sunday posies, with sometimes a choice few too much prized to be plucked; an orchard of proportioned size; a cheese-press, often supported by some tree near the door; a cluster of embowering sycamores for summer shade, with a tall fir through which the winds sing when other trees are leafless; the little rill or household spout murmuring in all seasons: combine these incidents and images together, and you have the representative idea of a mountain cottage in this country—so beautifully formed in itself, and so richly adorned by the hand of Nature."

These brief descriptions may suffice to indicate the general character of a district which in Wordsworth's early days had a distinctive unity which he was the first fully to appreciate, which was at its best during his long lifetime, and which has already begun to disappear. The mountains had waited long for a full adoration, an intelligent worship. At last "they were enough beloved." And if now the changes wrought around them recall too often the poet's warning, how

> "All that now delights thee, from the day
> On which it should be touched, shall melt, and melt away—"

yet they have gained something which cannot be taken from them. Not mines, nor railways, nor monster excursions, nor reservoirs, nor Manchester herself, "toute entière à sa proie attachée," can deprive lake and hill of Wordsworth's memory, and the love which once they knew.

Wordsworth's life was from the very first so ordered as to give him the most complete and intimate knowledge both of district and people. There was scarcely a mile of ground in the Lake country over which he had not wandered; scarcely a prospect which was not linked with his life by some tie of memory. Born at Cockermouth, on the outskirts of the district, his mind was gradually led on to its beauty; and his first recollections were of Derwent's grassy holms and rocky falls, with Skiddaw, "bronzed with deepest radiance," towering in the eastern sky. Sent to school at Hawkshead at eight years old, Wordsworth's scene was transferred to the other extremity of the Lake district. It was in this quaint old town, on the banks of Esthwaite Water, that the "fair seed-time of his soul" was passed; it was here that his boyish delight in exercise and adventure grew, and melted in its turn into a more impersonal yearning, a deeper absorption into the beauty and the wonder of the world. And even the records of his boyish amusements

come to us each on a background of nature's majesty and calm. Setting springs for woodcock on the grassy moors at night, at nine years old, he feels himself "a trouble to the peace" that dwells among the moon and stars overhead; and when he has appropriated a woodcock caught by somebody else, "sounds of undistinguishable motion" embody the viewless pursuit of Nemesis among the solitary hills. In the perilous search for the raven's nest, as he hangs on the face of the naked crags of Yewdale, he feels for the first time that sense of detachment from external things which a position of strange unreality will often force on the mind.

"Oh, at that time
When on the perilous ridge I hung alone,
With what strange utterance did the loud dry wind
Blow through my ear! the sky seemed not a sky
Of earth—and with what motion moved the clouds!"

The innocent rapine of *nutting* taught him to feel that there is a spirit in the woods—a presence which too rude a touch of ours will desecrate and destroy.

The neighbouring lakes of Coniston, Esthwaite, Windermere, have left similar traces of the gradual upbuilding of his spirit. It was on a promontory on Coniston that the sun's last rays, gilding the eastern hills above which he had first appeared, suggested the boy's first impulse of spontaneous poetry, in the resolve that, wherever life should lead him, his last thoughts should fall on the scenes where his childhood was passing now. It was on Esthwaite that the "huge peak" of Wetherlam, following him (as it seemed) as he rowed across the starlit water, suggested the dim conception of "unknown modes of being," and a life that is not ours. It was round Esthwaite that the boy used to wander with a friend at early dawn, rejoicing in the charm of words in tuneful order, and repeating together their favourite verses, till "sounds of exultation echoed through the groves." It was on Esthwaite that the band of skaters "hissed along the polished ice in games confederate," from which Wordsworth would sometimes withdraw himself and pause suddenly in full career, to feel in that dizzy silence the mystery of a rolling world.

A passage, less frequently quoted, in describing a boating excursion on Windermere illustrates the effect of some small point of human interest in concentrating and realising the diffused emotion which radiates from a scene of beauty:

"But, ere nightfall,
When in our pinnace we returned at leisure
Over the shadowy lake, and to the beach
Of some small island steered our course with one,
The minstrel of the troop, and left him there,
And rowed off gently, while he blew his flute
Alone upon the rock—oh, then the calm
And dead still water lay upon my mind
Even with a weight of pleasure, and the sky,
Never before so beautiful, sank down
Into my heart, and held me like a dream!"

The passage which describes the school-boy's call to the owls—the lines of which Coleridge said that he should have exclaimed "Wordsworth!" if he had met them running wild in the deserts of Arabia—paints a somewhat similar rush of feeling with a still deeper charm. The "gentle shock of mild surprise" which in the pauses of the birds' jocund din *carries far into his heart the sound of mountain torrents*—the very mingling of the grotesque and the majestic—brings home the contrast between our transitory energies and the mystery around us which returns ever the same to the moments when we pause and are at peace.

It is round the two small lakes of Grasmere and Rydal that the memories of Wordsworth are most thickly clustered. On one or other of these lakes he lived for fifty years—the first half of the present century; and there is not in all that region a hill-side walk or winding valley which has not heard him murmuring out his verses as they slowly rose from his heart. The cottage at Townend, Grasmere, where he first settled, is now surrounded by the out-buildings of a busy hotel, and the noisy stream of traffic, and the sight of the many villas which spot the valley, give a new pathos to the sonnet in which Wordsworth deplores the alteration which even his own residence might make in the simplicity of the lonely scene:

"Well may'st thou halt, and gaze with brightening eye!
The lovely cottage in the guardian nook
Hath stirred thee deeply; with its own dear brook
Its own small pasture, almost its own sky!
But covet not the abode: forbear to sigh,
As many do, repining while they look;
Intruders—who would tear from Nature's book
This precious leaf with harsh impiety.
Think what the home must be if it were thine,
Even thine, though few thy wants! Roof, wind
The very flowers are sacred to the poor,
The roses to the porch which they entwine:
Yea, all that now enchants thee, from the day
On which it should be touched, would melt, and melt away."

The *Poems on the Naming of Places* belong for the most part to this neighbourhood. *Emma's Dell* on Easdale Beck, *Point Rash-Judgment* on the eastern shore of Grasmere, *Mary's Pool* in Rydal Park, *William's Peak* on Stone Arthur, *Joanna's Rock* on the banks of Rotha, and *John's Grove* near White Moss Common, have been identified by the loving search of those to whom every memorial of that simple-hearted family group has still a charm.

It is on Greenhead Ghyll—"upon the forest-side in Grasmere Vale"—that the poet has laid the scene of *Michael*, the poem which paints with such detailed fidelity both the inner and the outward life of a typical West moreland "statesman." And the upper road from Grasmere to Rydal, superseded now by the road along the lake-side, and left as a winding foot-path among rock and fern, was one of his most habitual haunts. Of another such haunt his

friend Lady Richardson says, "The *Prelude* was chiefly composed in a green mountain terrace, on the Easdale side of Helm Crag, known by the name of Under Lancrigg, a place which he used to say he knew by heart. The ladies sat at their work on the hill-side while he walked to and fro on the smooth green mountain turf, humming out his verses to himself, and then repeating them to his sympathising and ready scribes, to be noted down on the spot and transcribed at home."

The neighbourhood of the poet's later home at Rydal Mount is equally full of associations. Two of the *Evening Voluntaries* were composed by the side of Rydal Mere. The *Wild Duck's Nest* was on one of the Rydal islands. It was on the fells of Loughrigg that the poet's fancy loved to plant an imperial castle. And *Wansfell's* green slope still answers with many a change of glow and shadow to the radiance of the sinking sun.

Hawkshead and Rydal, then, may be considered as the poet's principal centres, and the scenery in their neighbourhood has received his most frequent attention. The Duddon, a seldom-visited stream on the south-west border of the Lake district, has been traced by him from source to outfall in a series of sonnets. Langdale, and Little Langdale, with Blea Tarn lying in it, form the principal scene of the discourses in the *Excursion*. The more distant lakes and mountains were often visited, and are often alluded to. The scene of *The Brothers*, for example, is laid in Ennerdale; and the index of the minor poems will supply other instances. But it is chiefly round two lines of road leading from Grasmere that Wordsworth's associations cluster—the route over Dunmailraise, which led him to Keswick, to Coleridge and Southey at Greta Hall, and to other friends in that neighbourhood; and the route over Kirkstone, which led him to Ullswater, and the friendly houses of Patterdale, Hallsteads, and Lowther Castle. The first of these two routes was that over which the *Waggoner* plied; it skirts the lovely shore of Thirlmere—a lonely sheet of water, of exquisite irregularity of outline, and fringed with delicate verdure, which the Corporation of Manchester has lately bought to embank it into a reservoir. *Dedecorum pretiosus emptor!* This lake was a favorite haunt of Wordsworth's; and upon a rock on its margin, where he and Coleridge, coming from Keswick and Grasmere, would often meet, the two poets, with the other members of Wordsworth's loving household group, inscribed the initial letters of their names. To the "monumental power" of this Rock of Names Wordsworth appeals, in lines written when the happy company who engraved them had already been severed by distance and death:

> "O thought of pain,
> That would impair it or profane!
> And fail not Thou, loved Rock, to keep
> Thy charge when we are laid asleep."

The rock may still be seen, but is to be submerged in the new reservoir. In the vale of Keswick itself, Applethwaite, Skiddaw,

St. Herbert's Island, Lodore, are commemorated in sonnets or inscriptions. And the Borrowdale yew-trees have inspired some of the poet's noblest lines—lines breathing all the strange forlornness of Glaramara's solitude, and the withering vault of shade.

The route from Rydal to Ullswater is still more thickly studded with poetic allusions. The *Pass of Kirkstone* is the theme of a characteristic ode; Grisdale Tarn and Helvellyn recur again and again; and Aira Force was one of the spots which the poet best loved to describe as well as to visit. It was on the shores of Further Gowbarrow that the *Daffodils* danced beneath the trees. These references might be much further multiplied; and the loving diligence of disciples has set before us "the Lake district as interpreted by Wordsworth" through a multitude of details. But enough has been said to show how completely the poet had absorbed the influences of his dwelling-places; how unique a representative he had become of the lovely district of his birth; how he had made it subject to him by comprehending it, and his own by love.

He visited other countries and described other scenes. Scotland, Wales, Switzerland, France, Germany, Italy, have all a place in his works. His familiarity with other scenery helped him, doubtless, to a better appreciation of the Lake country than he could have gained had he never left it. And, on the other hand, like Cæsar in Gaul, or Wellington in the Peninsular, it was because he had so complete a grasp of this chosen base of operations that he was able to come, to see, and to make his own, so swiftly and unfailingly elsewhere. Happy are those whose deep-rooted memories cling like his about some stable home! whose notion of the world around them has expanded from some prospect of happy tranquillity, instead of being drawn at random from the confusing city's roar! Happier still if that early picture be of one of those rare scenes which have inspired poets and prophets with the retrospective day-dream of a patriarchal, or a golden age; of some plot of ground like the Ithaca of Odysseus, τρηχεῖ, ἀλλ' ἀλοθη κουροτρόφος, "rough, but a nurse of *men;*" of some life like that which a poet of kindred spirit to Wordsworth's saw half in vision half in reality, among the husbandmen of the Italian hills:

> "Peace, peace is theirs, and life no fraud that knows,
> Wealth as they will, and when they will, repose:
> On many a hill the happy homesteads stand,
> The living lakes through many a vale expand;
> Cool glens are there, and shadowy caves divine,
> Deep sleep, and far-off voices of the kine—
> From moor to moor the exulting wild deer stray;
> The strenuous youth are strong and sound as they;
> One reverence still the untainted race inspires,
> God their first thought, and after God their sires;—
> These last discerned Astræa's flying hem,
> And Virtue's latest footsteps walked with them."

CHAPTER V.

MARRIAGE.—SOCIETY.—HIGHLAND TOUR.

WITH Wordsworth's settlement at Townend, Grasmere, in the closing days of the last century, the external events of his life may be said to come to an end. Even his marriage to Miss Mary Hutchinson, of Penrith, on October 4, 1802, was not so much an importation into his existence of new emotion, as a development and intensification of feelings which had long been there. This marriage was the crowning stroke of Wordsworth's felicity—the poetic recompense for his steady advocacy of all simple and noble things. When he wished to illustrate the true dignity and delicacy of rustic lives he was always accustomed to refer to the Cumbrian folk And now it seemed that Cumberland requited him for his praises with her choicest boon; found for him in the country town of Penrith, and from the small and obscure circle of his connexions and acquaintance—nay, from the same dame's school in which he was taught to read—a wife such as neither rank nor young beauty nor glowing genius enabled his brother bards to win.

Mrs. Wordsworth's poetic appreciativeness, manifest to all who knew her, is attested by the poet's assertion that two of the best lines in the poem of *The Daffodils*—

> "They flash upon that inward eye
> Which is the bliss of solitude"—

were of her composition. And in all other matters, from the highest to the lowest, she was to him a true helpmate, a companion "dearer far than life and light are dear," and able "in his steep march to uphold him to the end." Devoted to her husband, she nevertheless welcomed not only without jealousy but with delight the household companionship through life of the sister who formed so large an element in his being. Admiring the poet's genius to the full, and following the workings of his mind with a sympathy that never tired, she nevertheless was able to discern, and with unobtrusive care to hide or avert, those errors of manner into which retirement and self-absorption will betray even the gentlest spirit. It speaks, perhaps, equally well for Wordsworth's character that this tendency to a lengthy insistence, in general conversation, on his own feelings and ideas is the worst charge that can be

brought against him; and for Mrs. Wordsworth's, that her simple and rustic upbringing had gifted her with a manner so gracious and a tact so ready that in her presence all things could not but go well.

The life which the young couple led was one of primitive simplicity. In some respects it was even less luxurious than that of the peasants around them. They drank water, and ate the simplest fare. Miss Wordsworth had long rendered existence possible for her brother on the narrowest of means by her unselfish energy and skill in household management; and "plain living and high thinking" were equally congenial to the new inmate of the frugal home. Wordsworth gardened; and all together, or oftenest the poet and his sister, wandered almost daily over the neighbouring hills. Narrow means did not prevent them from offering a generous welcome to their few friends, especially Coleridge and his family, who repeatedly stayed for months under Wordsworth's roof. Miss Wordsworth's unpublished letters breathe the very spirit of hospitality in their naïve details of the little sacrifices gladly made for the sake of the presence of these honoured guests. But for the most part their life was solitary and uneventful. Books they had few; neighbours almost none; and Miss Wordsworth's diary of these early years describes a life seldom paralleled in its intimate dependence on external nature. I take, almost at random, her account of a single day. "November 24, 1801. Read Chaucer. We walked by Gell's cottage. As we were going along we were stopped at once, at the distance, perhaps, of fifty yards from our favourite birch-tree; it was yielding to the gust of wind, with all its tender twigs; the sun shone upon it, and it glanced in the wind like a flying sunshiny shower. It was a tree in shape, with stem and branches; but it was like a spirit of water. After our return William read Spenser to us, and then walked to John's Grove. Went to meet W." And from an unpublished letter of Miss Wordsworth's, of about the same period (September 10, 1800), I extract her description of the new home. "We are daily more delighted with Grasmere and its neighbourhood. Our walks are perpetually varied, and we are more fond of the mountains as our acquaintance with them increases. We have a boat upon the lake, and a small orchard and smaller garden, which, as it is the work of our own hands, we regard with pride and partiality. Our cottage is quite large enough for us, though very small; and we have made it neat and comfortable within doors; and it looks very nice on the outside; for though the roses and honeysuckles which we have planted against it are only of this year's growth, yet it is covered all over with green leaves and scarlet flowers; for we have trained scarlet beans upon threads, which are not only exceedingly beautiful but very useful, as their produce is immense. We have made a lodging-room of the parlour below stairs, which has a stone floor, therefore we have covered it all over with matting. We sit in a room above stairs, and we have one lodging-room with two single beds, a sort of lumber-room, and a small, low, unceiled room, which

I have papered with newspapers, and in which we have put a small bed. Our servant is an old woman of sixty years of age, whom we took partly out of charity. She was very ignorant, very foolish, and very difficult to teach. But the goodness of her disposition, and the great convenience we should find if my perseverance was successful, induced me to go on."

The sonnets entitled *Personal Talk* give a vivid picture of the blessings of such seclusion. There are many minds which will echo the exclamation with which the poet dismisses his visitors and their gossip:

> "Better than such discourse doth silence long,
> Long barren silence, square with my desire;
> To sit without emotion, hope, or aim,
> In the loved presence of my cottage fire,
> And listen to the flapping of the flame,
> Or kettle whispering its faint undersong."

Many will look with envy on a life which has thus decisively cut itself loose from the world; which is secure from the influx of those preoccupations, at once distracting and nugatory, which deaden the mind to all other stimulus, and split the river of life into channels so minute that it loses itself in the sand.

> "Hence have I genial seasons; hence have I
> Smooth passions, smooth discourse, and joyous thought.

Left to herself, the mind can expatiate in those kingdoms of the spirit bequeathed to us by past generations and distant men, which to the idle are but a garden of idleness, but to those who choose it become a true possession and an ever-widening home. Among those "nobler loves and nobler cares" there is excitement without reaction, there is an unwearied and impersonal joy—a joy which can only be held cheap because it is so abundant, and can only disappoint us through our own incapacity to contain it. These delights of study and of solitude Wordsworth enjoyed to the full. In no other poet, perhaps, have the poet's heightened sensibilities been productive of a pleasure so unmixed with pain. The wind of his emotions blew right abaft; he "swam smoothly in the stream of his nature, and lived but one man."

The blessing of meditative and lonely hours must of course be purchased by corresponding limitations. Wordsworth's conception of human character retained to the end an extreme simplicity. Many of life's most impressive phenomena were hid from his eyes. He never encountered any of those rare figures whose aspect seems to justify all traditions of pomp and pre-eminence when they appear amid stately scenes as with a natural sovereignty. He neither achieved nor underwent any of those experiences which can make all high romance seem a part of memory, and bestow, as it were, a password and introduction into the very innermost of human fates. On the other hand, he almost wholly escaped those sufferings which exceptional natures must needs derive from too

close a contact with this commonplace world. It was not his lot—as it has been the lot of so many poets—to move amongst mankind at once as an intimate and a stranger; to travel from disillusionment to disillusionment, and from regret to regret; to construct around him a world of ideal beings, who crumble into dust at his touch; to hope from them what they can neither understand nor accomplish, to lavish on them what they can never repay. Such pain, indeed, may become a discipline; and the close contact with many lives may teach to the poetic nature lessons of courage, of self-suppression, of resolute good-will, and may transform into an added dignity the tumult of emotions which might else have run riot in his heart. Yet it is less often from moods of self-control than from moods of self-abandonment that the fount of poetry springs; and herein it was that Wordsworth's especial felicity lay —that there was no one feeling in him which the world had either repressed or tainted; that he had no joy which might not be the harmless joy of all; and that, therefore, it was when he was most unreservedly himself that he was most profoundly human. All that was needful for him was to strike down into the deep of his heart. Or, using his own words, we may compare his tranquil existence to

> "A crystal river,
> Diaphanous because it travels slowly;"

and in which poetic thoughts rose unimpeded to the surface, like bubbles through the pellucid stream.

The first hint of many of his briefer poems is to be found in his sister's diary:

"*April* 15, 1802.—When we were in the woods below Gowbarrow Park we saw a few *daffodils* close to the water side. As we went along there were more and yet more; and at last, under the boughs of the trees, we saw there was a long belt of them along the shore. I never saw daffodils so beautiful. They grew among the mossy stones about them; some rested their heads on the stones as on a pillow; the rest tossed, and reeled, and danced, and seemed as if they verily danced with the wind, they looked so gay and glancing."

"*July* 30, 1802.—Left London between five and six o'clock of the morning, outside the Dover coach. A beautiful morning. The city, St. Paul's, with the river, a multitude of little boats, made a beautiful sight as we crossed Westminster Bridge; the houses not overhung by their clouds of smoke, were spread out endlessly; yet the sun shone so brightly, with such a pure light, that there was something like the purity of one of nature's own grand spectacles. Arrived at Calais at four in the morning of July 31st. Delightful walks in the evenings, seeing far off in the west the coast of England like a cloud, crested with Dover Castle, the evening star, and the glory of the sky. The reflections in the water were more beautiful than the sky itself; purple waves brighter than precious stones for ever melting away upon the sands."

How simple are the elements of these delights! There is nothing here, except fraternal affection, a sunrise, a sunset, a flock

of bright wild flowers; and yet the sonnets on *Westminster Bridge* and *Calais Sands*, and the stanzas on the *Daffodils*, have taken their place among the permanent records of the profoundest human joy.

Another tour—this time through Scotland—undertaken in August, 1803, inspired Wordsworth with several of his best pieces. Miss Wordsworth's diary of this tour has been lately published, and should be familiar to all lovers of nature. The sister's journal is, indeed, the best introduction to the brother's poems. It has not—it cannot have—their dignity and beauty; but it exemplifies the same method of regarding Nature, the same self-identification with her subtler aspects and entrance into her profounder charm. It is interesting to notice how the same impression strikes both minds at once. From the sister's it is quickly reflected in words of exquisite delicacy and simplicity; in the brother's it germinates, and reappears, it may be months or years afterwards, as the nucleus of a mass of thought and feeling which has grown round it in his musing soul. The travellers' encounter with two Highland girls on the shore of Loch Lomond is a good instance of this. "One of the girls," writes Miss Wordsworth, "was exceedingly beautiful; and the figures of both of them, in gray plaids falling to their feet, their faces only being uncovered, excited our attention before we spoke to them; but they answered us so sweetly that we were quite delighted, at the same time that they stared at us with an innocent look of wonder. I think I never heard the English language sound more sweetly than from the mouth of the elder of these girls, while she stood at the gate answering our inquiries, her face flushed with the rain; her pronunciation was clear and distinct, without difficulty, yet slow, as if like a foreign speech."

> "A face with gladness overspread!
> Soft smiles, by human kindness bred!
> And seemliness complete, that sways
> Thy courtesies, about thee plays;
> With no restraint, but such as springs
> From quick and eager visitings
> Of thoughts that lie beyond the reach
> Of thy few words of English speech:
> A bondage sweetly brooked, a strife
> That gives thy gestures grace and life!
> So have I, not unmoved in mind,
> Seen birds of tempest-loving kind
> Thus beating up against the wind."

The travellers saw more of this girl, and Miss Wordsworth's opinion was confirmed. But to Wordsworth his glimpse of her became a veritable romance. He commemorated it in his poem of *The Highland Girl*, soon after his return from Scotland; he narrated it once more in his poem of *The Three Cottage Girls*, written nearly twenty years afterwards; and "the sort of prophecy," he says in 1843, "with which the verses conclude has, through God's

goodness, been realised; and now, approaching the close of my seventy-third year, I have a most vivid remembrance of her and the beautiful objects with which she was surrounded." Nay, more; he has elsewhere informed us, with some naïveté, that the first few lines of his exquisite poem to his wife, *She was a phantom of delight*, were originally composed as a description of this Highland maid, who would seem almost to have formed for him ever afterwards a kind of type and image of loveliness.

That such a meeting as this should have formed so long remembered an incident in the poet's life will appear, perhaps, equally ridiculous to the philosopher and to the man of the world. The one would have given less, the other would have demanded more. And yet the quest of beauty, like the quest of truth, reaps its surest reward when it is disinterested as well as keen; and the true lover of human kind will often draw his most exquisite moments from what to most men seems but the shadow of a joy. Especially, as in this case, his heart will be prodigal of the impulses of that protecting tenderness which it is the blessing of early girlhood to draw forth unwittingly, and to enjoy unknown—affections which lead to no declaration, and desire no return; which are the spontaneous effluence of the very Spirit of Love in man; and which play and hover around winning innocence like the coruscations round the head of the unconscious Iulus, a soft and unassuming flame.

It was well, perhaps, that Wordsworth's romance should come to him in this remote and fleeting fashion. For to the Priest of Nature it was fitting that all things else should be harmonious, indeed, but accessory; that joy should not be so keen, nor sorrow so desolating, nor love itself so wildly strong, as to prevent him from going out upon the mountains with a heart at peace, and receiving "in a wise passiveness" the voices of earth and heaven.

CHAPTER VI.

SIR GEORGE BEAUMONT.—DEATH OF JOHN WORDSWORTH.

THE year 1803 saw the beginning of a friendship which formed a valuable element in Wordsworth's life. Sir George Beaumont, of Coleorton Hall, Essex, a descendant of the dramatist, and representative of a family long distinguished for talent and culture, was staying with Coleridge at Greta Hall, Keswick, when, hearing of Coleridge's affection for Wordsworth, he was struck with the wish to bring Wordsworth also to Keswick, and bought and presented to him a beautiful piece of land at Applethwaite, under Skiddaw, in the hope that he might be induced to settle there. Coleridge was soon afterwards obliged to leave England in search of health, and the plan fell through. A characteristic letter of Wordsworth's records his feelings on the occasion. "Dear Sir George," he writes, "if any person were to be informed of the particulars of your kindness to me—if it were described to him in all its delicacy and nobleness—and he should afterwards be told that I suffered eight weeks to elapse without writing to you one word of thanks or acknowledgment, he would deem it a thing absolutely *impossible*. It is nevertheless true

"Owing to a set of painful and uneasy sensations which I have, more or less, at all times about my chest, I deferred writing to you, being at first made still more uncomfortable by travelling, and loathing to do violence to myself in what ought to be an act of pure pleasure and enjoyment, viz, the expression of my deep sense of your goodness. This feeling was indeed so strong in me as to make me look upon the act of writing to you as a thing not to be done but in my best, my purest, and my happiest moments. Many of these I had, but then I had not my pen, ink, and paper before me, my conveniences, 'my appliances and means to boot;' all which, the moment that I thought of them, seemed to disturb and impair the sanctity of my pleasure. I contented myself with thinking over my complacent feelings, and breathing forth solitary gratulations and thanksgivings, which I did in many a sweet and many a wild place, during my late tour."

The friendship of which this act of delicate generosity was the beginning was maintained till Sir George Beaumont's death in 1827, and formed for many years Wordsworth's closest link with the world of art and culture. Sir George was himself a painter as well as a connoisseur, and his landscapes are not without indica-

tions of the strong feeling for nature which he undoubtedly possessed. Wordsworth, who had seen very few pictures, but was a penetrating critic of those which he knew, discerned this vein of true feeling in his friend's work, and has idealised a small landscape which Sir George had given him, in a sonnet which reproduces the sense of happy pause and voluntary fixation with which the mind throws itself into some scene where art has given

> "To one brief moment caught from fleeting time
> The appropriate calm of blest eternity."

There was another pursuit in which Sir George Beaumont was much interested, and in which painter and poet were well fitted to unite. The landscape-gardener, as Wordsworth says, should "work in the spirit of Nature, with an invisible hand of art." And he shows how any real success can only be achieved when the designer is willing to incorporate himself with the scenery around him; to postpone to its indications the promptings of his own pride or caprice; to interpret Nature to herself by completing touches; to correct her with deference, and, as it were, to caress her without importunity. And rising to that aspect of the question which connects it with human society, he is strenuous in condemnation of that taste, not so much for solitude as for isolation, which can tolerate no neighbourhood, and finds its only enjoyment in the sense of monopoly.

"Laying out grounds, as it is called, may be considered as a liberal art, in some sort like poetry and painting; its object ought to be to move the affections under the control of good-sense; and surely the affections of those who have the deepest perception of the beauty of Nature—who have the most valuable feelings, that is, the most permanent, the most independent, the most ennobling, connected with Nature and human life. No liberal art aims merely at the gratification of an individual or a class; the painter or poet is degraded in proportion as he does so. The true servants of the arts pay homage to the human-kind as impersonated in unwarped and enlightened minds. If this be so when we are merely putting together words or colours, how much more ought the feeling to prevail when we are in the midst of the realities of things; of the beauty and harmony, of the joy and happiness, of loving creatures; of men and children, of birds and beasts, of hills and streams, and trees and flowers; with the changes of night and day, evening and morning, summer and winter; and all their unwearied actions and energies, as benign in the spirit that animates them as they are beautiful and grand in that form of clothing which is given to them for the delight of our senses! What, then, shall we say of many great mansions, with their unqualified expulsion of human creatures from their neighbourhood, happy or not; houses which do what is fabled of the upas-tree—breathe out death and desolation! For my part, strip my neighbourhood of human beings, and I think it one of the greatest privations I could undergo. You have all the poverty of solitude, nothing of its elevation."

This passage is from a letter of Wordsworth's to Sir George Beaumont, who was engaged at the time in rebuilding and laying

out Coleorton. The poet himself planned and superintended some of these improvements, and wrote, for various points of interest in the grounds, inscriptions which form dignified examples of that kind of composition.

Nor was Sir George Beaumont the only friend whom the poet's taste assisted in the choice of a site or the disposition of pleasure-grounds. More than one seat in the Lake country—among them one home of pre-eminent beauty—have owed to Wordsworth no small part of their ordered charm. In this way, too, the poet is with us still: his presence has a strange reality as we look on some majestic prospect of interwinding lake and mountain which his design has made more beautifully visible to the children's children of those he loved; as we stand, perhaps, in some shadowed garden-ground where his will has had its way—has framed Helvellyn's far-off summit in an arch of tossing green, and embayed in towering forest-trees the long lawns of a silent valley—fit haunt for lofty aspiration and for brooding calm.

But of all woodland ways which Wordsworth's skill designed or his feet frequented, not one was dearer to him (if I may pass thus by a gentle transition to another of the strong affections of his life) than a narrow path through a firwood near his cottage, which "was known to the poet's household by the name of John's Grove." For in the year 1800 his brother, John Wordsworth, a few years younger than himself, and captain of an East Indiaman, had spent eight months in the poet's cottage at Grasmere. The two brothers had seen little of each other since childhood, and the poet had now the delight of discovering in the sailor a character congenial to his own, and an appreciation of poetry—and of the *Lyrical Ballads* especially—which was intense and delicate in an unusual degree. In both brothers, too, there was the same love of nature; and after John's departure, the poet pleased himself with imagining the visions of Grasmere which beguiled the watches of many a night at sea, or with tracing the pathway which the sailor's instinct had planned and trodden amid trees so thickly planted as to baffle a less practised skill. John Wordsworth, on the other hand, looked forward to Grasmere as the final goal of his wanderings, and intended to use his own savings to set the poet free from worldly cares.

Two more voyages the sailor made with such hopes as these, and amid a frequent interchange of books and letters with his brother at home. Then, in February, 1805, he set sail from Portsmouth, in command of the "Abergavenny" East Indiaman, bound for India and China. Through the incompetence of the pilot who was taking her out of the Channel, the ship struck on the Shambles off the Bill of Portland, on February 5, 1805. "She struck," says Wordsworth, "at 5 p.m. Guns were fired immediately, and were continued to be fired. She was gotten off the rock at half-past seven, but had taken in so much water, in spite of constant pumping, as to be water-logged. They had, however, hope that she might still be run upon Weymouth sands, and with this view

continued pumping and baling till eleven, when she went down. . . A few minutes before the ship went down my brother was seen talking to the first mate with apparent cheerfulness; and he was standing on the hen-coop, which is the point from which he could overlook the whole ship, the moment she went down—dying, as he had lived, in the very place and point where his duty stationed him."

"For myself," he continues elsewhere, "I feel that there is something cut out of my life which cannot be restored. I never thought of him but with hope and delight. We looked forward to the time, not distant, as we thought, when he would settle near us—when the task of his life would be over, and he would have nothing to do but reap his reward. By that time I hoped also that the chief part of my labours would be executed, and that I should be able to show him that he had not placed a false confidence in me. I never wrote a line without a thought of giving him pleasure; my writings, printed and manuscript, were his delight, and one of the chief solaces of his long voyages. But let me stop. I will not be cast down; were it only for his sake, I will not be dejected. I have much yet to do, and pray God to give me strength and power; his part of the agreement between us is brought to an end, mine continues; and I hope, when I shall be able to think of him with a calmer mind, that the remembrance of him dead will even animate me more than the joy which I had in him living."

In these and the following reflections there is nothing of novelty; yet there is an interest in the spectacle of this strong and simple mind confronted with the universal problems, and taking refuge in the thoughts which have satisfied, or scarcely satisfied, so many generations of mourning men.

"A thousand times have I asked myself, as your tender sympathy led me to do, 'Why was he taken away?' and I have answered the question as you have done. In fact, there is no other answer which can satisfy, and lay the mind at rest. Why have we a choice, and a will, and a notion of justice and injustice, enabling us to be moral agents? Why have we sympathies that make the best of us so afraid of inflicting pain and sorrow, which yet we see dealt about so lavishly by the Supreme Governor? Why should our notions of right towards each other, and to all sentient beings within our influence, differ so widely from what appears to be his notion and rule, *if everything were to end here?* Would it not be blasphemy to say that, upon the supposition of the thinking principle being *destroyed by death*, however inferior we may be to the great Cause and Ruler of things, we have *more of love* in our nature than he has? The thought is monstrous; and yet how to get rid of it except upon the supposition of *another* and a *better world*, I do not see."

From this calamity, as from all the lessons of life, Wordsworth drew all the benefit which it was empowered to bring. "A deep distress hath humanised my soul"—what lover of poetry does not

know the pathetic lines in which he bears witness to the teaching of sorrow? Other griefs, too, he had—the loss of two children in 1812; his sister's chronic illness, beginning in 1832; his daughter's death in 1847. All these he felt to the full; and yet, until his daughter's death, which was more than his failing energies could bear, these bereavements were but the thinly-scattered clouds "in a great sea of blue"—seasons of mourning here and there among years which never lost their hold on peace; which knew no shame and no remorse, no desolation and no fear; whose days were never long with weariness, nor their nights broken at the touch of woe. Even when we speak of his tribulations, it is his happiness which rises in our minds.

And inasmuch as this felicity is the great fact of Wordsworth's life—since his history is for the most part but the history of a halcyon calm—we find ourselves forced upon the question whether such a life is to be held desirable or no. Happiness with honour was the ideal of Solon; is it also ours? To the modern spirit—to the Christian, in whose ears counsels of perfection have left "a presence that is not to be put by," this question, at which a Greek would have smiled, is of no such easy solution.

To us, perhaps, in computing the fortune of any one whom we hold dear, it may seem more needful to enquire not whether he has had enough of joy, but whether he has had enough of sorrow; whether the blows of circumstance have wholly shaped his character from the rock; whether his soul has taken lustre and purity in the refiner's fire. Nor is it only (as some might say) for violent and faulty natures that sorrow is the best. It is true that by sorrow only can the headstrong and presumptuous spirit be shamed into gentleness and solemnised into humility. But sorrow is used also by the Power above us in cases where we men would have shrunk in horror from so rough a touch. Natures that were already of a heroic unselfishness, of a childlike purity, have been raised ere now by anguish upon anguish, woe after woe, to a height of holiness which we may believe that they could have reached by no other road. Why should it not be so? since there is no limit to the soul's possible elevation, why should her purifying trials have any assignable end? She is of a metal which can grow for ever brighter in the fiercening flame. And if, then, we would still pronounce the true Beatitudes not on the rejoicing, the satisfied, the highly-honoured, but after an ancient and sterner pattern, what account are we to give of Wordsworth's long years of blissful calm?

In the first place, we may say that his happiness was as wholly free from vulgar or transitory elements as a man's can be. It lay in a life which most men would have found austere and blank indeed; a life from which not Crœsus only but Solon would have turned in scorn; a life of poverty and retirement, of long apparent failure, and honour that came tardily at the close; it was a happiness nourished on no sacrifice of other men, on no eager appropriation of the goods of earth, but springing from

single eye and a loving spirit, and wrought from those primary emotions which are the innocent birthright of all. And if it be answered that, however truly philosophic, however sacredly pure, his happiness may have been, yet its wisdom and its holiness were without an effort, and that it is effort which makes the philosopher and the saint: then we must use in answer his own Platonic scheme of things, to express a thought which we can but dimly apprehend; and we must say that, though progress be inevitably linked in our minds with struggle, yet neither do we conceive of struggle as without a pause; there must be prospect-places in the long ascent of souls; and the whole of this earthly life—this one existence, standing we know not where among the myriad that have been for us or shall be—may not be too much to occupy with one of those outlooks of vision and of prophecy, when

> "In a season of calm weather,
> Though inland far we be,
> Our souls have sight of that immortal sea
> Which brought us hither;
> Can in a moment travel thither,
> And see the children sport upon the shore,
> And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore."

CHAPTER VII.

"HAPPY WARRIOR," AND PATRIOTIC POEMS.

THE year 1805, which bereft Wordsworth of a beloved brother brought with it also another death, which was felt by the whole English nation like a private calamity. The emotion which Wordsworth felt at the news of Trafalgar—the way in which he managed to intertwine the memories of Nelson and of his own brother in his heart—may remind us fitly at this point of our story of the distress and perplexity of nations which for so many years surrounded the quiet Grasmere home, and of the strong responsive emotion with which the poet met each shock of European fates.

When England first took up arms against the French revolution, Wordsworth's feeling, as we have seen, had been one of unmixed sorrow and shame. Bloody and terrible as the revolution had become, it was still in some sort representative of human freedom; at any rate, it might still seem to contain possibilities of progress such as the retrograde despotisms with which England allied herself could never know. But the conditions of the contest changed before long. France had not the wisdom, the courage, the constancy to play to the end the part for which she had seemed chosen among the nations. It was her conduct towards Switzerland which decisively altered Wordsworth's view. He saw her valiant spirit of self-defence corrupted into lust of glory; her eagerness for the abolition of unjust privilege turned into a contentment with equality of degradation under a despot's heel. "One man, of men the meanest too"—for such the First Consul must needs appear to the moralist's eye—was

> "Raised up to sway the world—to do, undo;
> With mighty nations for his underlings."

And history herself seemed vulgarised by the repetition of her ancient tales of war and overthrow on a scale of such apparent magnitude, but with no glamour of distance to hide the baseness of the agencies by which the destinies of Europe were shaped anew. This was an occasion that tried the hearts of men; it was not easy to remain through all those years at once undazzled and untempted, and never in the blackest hour to despair of human virtue.

In his tract on *The Convention of Cintra*, 1808, Wordsworth has given the fullest expression to this undaunted temper:

"Oppression, its own blind and predestined enemy, has poured this of blessedness upon Spain—that the enormity of the outrages of which she has been the victim has created an object of love and of hatred, of apprehensions and of wishes, adequate (if that be possible) to the utmost demands of human spirit. The heart that serves in this cause, if it languish, must languish from its own constitutional weakness, and not through want of nourishment from without. But it is a belief propagated in books, and which passes currently among talking men as part of their familiar wisdom, that the hearts of the many *are* constitutionally weak, that they *do* languish, and are slow to answer to the requisitions of things. I entreat those who are in this delusion to look behind them and about them for the evidence of experience. Now this, rightly understood, not only gives no support to any such belief, but proves that the truth is in direct opposition to it. The history of all ages—tumults after tumults, wars foreign or civil, with short or with no breathing-places from generation to generation; the senseless weaving and interweaving of factions, vanishing, and reviving, and piercing each other like the Northern Lights; public commotions and those in the breast of the individual; the long calenture to which the Lover is subject; the blast, like the blast of the desert, which sweeps perennially through a frightful solitude of its own making in the mind of the Gamester; the slowly quickening, but ever quickening, descent of appetite down which the Miser is propelled; the agony, and cleaving oppression of grief; the ghost-like hauntings of shame; the incubus of revenge; the life-distemper of ambition . . . these demonstrate incontestably that the passions of men (I mean the soul of sensibility in the heart of man), in all quarrels, in all contests, in all quests, in all delights, in all employments which are either sought by men or thrust upon them, do immeasurably transcend their objects. The true sorrow of humanity consists in this—not that the mind of man fails, but that the cause and demands of action and of life so rarely correspond with the dignity and intensity of human desires; and hence, that which is slow to languish is too easily turned aside and abused. But, with the remembrance of what has been done, and in the face of the interminable evils which are threatened, a Spaniard can never have cause to complain of this while a follower of the tyrant remains in arms upon the Peninsula."

It was passages such as this, perhaps, which led Canning to declare that Wordsworth's pamphlet was the finest piece of political eloquence which had appeared since Burke. And yet if we compare it with Burke, or with the great Greek exemplar of all those who would give speech the cogency of act—we see at once the causes of its practical failure. In Demosthenes the thoughts and principles are often as lofty as any patriot can express; but their loftiness, in his speech, as in the very truth of things, seemed but to add to their immediate reality. They were beaten and inwoven into the facts of the hour; action seemed to turn on them as on its only possible pivot; it was as though Virtue and Freedom hung armed in heaven above the assembly, and in the visible likeness of immortal ancestors beckoned upon an urgent way. Wordsworth's mood of mind, on the other hand, as he has depicted it in two son-

nets written at the same time as his tract, explains why it was that that appeal was rather a solemn protest than an effective exhortation. In the first sonnet he describes the surroundings of his task —the dark wood and rocky cave, "the hollow vale which foaming torrents fill with omnipresent murmur:"

> "Here mighty Nature! in this school sublime
> I weigh the hopes and fears of suffering Spain;
> For her consult the auguries of time,
> And through the human heart explore my way,
> And look and listen, gathering whence I may
> Triumph, and thoughts no bondage can restrain."

And then he proceeds to conjecture what effect his tract will produce:

> "I dropped my pen, and listened to the wind,
> That sang of trees uptorn and vessels tost
> A midnight harmony, and wholly lost
> To the general sense of men, by chains confined
> Of business, care, or pleasure,—or resigned
> To timely sleep. Thought I, the impassioned train
> Without which aid of numbers I sustain
> Like acceptation from the world will find."

This deliberate and lonely emotion was fitter to inspire grave poetry than a pamphlet appealing to an immediate crisis. And the sonnets dedicated *To Liberty* (1802–16) are the outcome of many moods like these.

It is little to say of these sonnets that they are the most permanent record in our literature of the Napoleonic war. For that distinction they have few competitors. Two magnificent songs of Campbell's, an ode of Coleridge's, a few spirited stanzas of Byron's —strangely enough there is little besides these that lives in the national memory, till we come to the ode which summed up the long contest a generation later, when its great captain passed away. But these *Sonnets to Liberty* are worthy of comparison with the noblest passages of patriotic verse or prose which all our history has inspired—the passages where Shakspeare brings his rays to focus on "this earth, this realm, this England"—or where the dread of national dishonour has kindled Chatham to an iron glow—or where Milton rises from the polemic into the prophet, and Burke from the partisan into the philosopher. The armoury of Wordsworth, indeed, was not forged with the same fire as that of these "invincible knights of old." He had not swayed senates, nor directed policies, nor gathered into one ardent bosom all the spirit of a heroic age. But he had deeply felt what it is that makes the greatness of nations; in that extremity no man was more staunch than he; no man more unwaveringly disdained unrighteous empire, or kept the might of moral forces more steadfastly in view. Not Stein could place a manlier reliance on "a few strong instincts and a few plain rules;" not Fichte could invoke more convincingly the "great allies" which work with "Man's unconquerable mind."

Here and there, indeed, throughout these sonnets are scattered strokes of high poetic admiration or scorn which could hardly be overmatched in Æschylus. Such is the indignant correction—

> "Call not the royal Swede unfortunate,
> Who never did to Fortune bend the knee!"

or the stern touch which closes a description of Flamininus's proclamation at the Isthmian games, according liberty to Greece—

> "A gift of that which is not to be given
> By all the blended powers of Earth and Heaven!"

Space forbids me to dwell in detail on these noble poems—on the well known sonnets to Venice, to Milton, &c.; on the generous tributes to the heroes of the contest—Schill, Hoffer, Toussaint, Palafox; or on the series which contrast the instinctive greatness of the Spanish people at bay with Napoleon's lying promises and inhuman pride. But if Napoleon's career afforded to Wordsworth a poetic example, impressive as that of Xerxes to the Greeks, of lawless and intoxicated power, there was need of some contrasted figure more notable than Hoffer or Palafox from which to draw the lessons which great contests can teach of unselfish valour. Was there then any man, by land or sea, who might serve as the poet's type of the ideal hero? To an Englishman, at least, this question carries its own reply. For by a singular destiny England, with a thousand years of noble history behind her, has chosen for her best-beloved, for her national hero, not an Arminius from the age of legend, not a Henri Quatre from the age of chivalry, but a man whom men still living have seen and known. For, indeed, England and all the world as to this man were of one accord; and when in victory, on his ship *Victory*, Nelson passed away, the thrill which shook mankind was of a nature such as perhaps was never felt at any other death—so unanimous was the feeling of friends and foes that earth had lost her crowning example of impassioned self-devotedness and of heroic honour.

And yet it might have seemed that between Nelson's nature and Wordsworth's there was little in common. The obvious limitations of the great Admiral's culture and character were likely to be strongly felt by the philosophic poet. And a serious crime, of which Nelson was commonly, though, as now appears, erroneously,* supposed to be guilty, was sure to be judged by Wordsworth with great severity.

Wordsworth was, in fact, hampered by some such feelings of disapproval. He even tells us, with that näive affectionateness which often makes us smile, that he has had recourse to the character of his own brother John for the qualities in which the great

* The researches of Sir Nicholas Nicolas (*Letters and Despatches of Lord Nelson*, vol. vii., Appendix) have placed Lord Nelson's connexion with Lady Hamilton in an unexpected light.

Admiral appeared to him to have been deficient. But on these hesitations it would be unjust to dwell. I mention them only to bring out the fact that between these two men, so different in outward fates—between "the adored, the incomparable Nelson" and the homely poet, "retired as noontide dew"—there was a moral likeness so profound that the ideal of the recluse was realised in the public life of the hero, and, on the other hand, the hero himself is only seen as completely heroic when his impetuous life stands out for us from the solemn background of the poet's calm. And surely these two natures taken together make the perfect Englishman. Nor is there any portrait fitter than that of *The Happy Warrior* to go forth to all lands as representing the English character at its height—a figure not ill-matching with "Plutarch's men."

For indeed this short poem is in itself a manual of greatness; there is a Roman majesty in its simple and weighty speech. And what eulogy was ever nobler than that passage where, without definite allusion or quoted name, the poet depicts, as it were, the very summit of glory in the well-remembered aspect of the Admiral in his last and greatest hour?

> "Whose powers shed round him, in the common strife,
> Or mild concerns of ordinary life,
> A constant influence, a peculiar grace;
> But who, if he be called upon to face
> Some awful moment to which Heaven has joined
> Great issues, good or bad for human kind,
> *Is happy as a Lover, and attired*
> *With sudden brightness, like a Man inspired.*"

Or again, where the hidden thought of Nelson's womanly tenderness, of his constant craving for the green earth and home affections in the midst of storm and war, melts the stern verses into a sudden change of tone:

> "He who, though thus endued as with a sense
> And faculty for storm and turbulence,
> *Is yet a Soul whose master-bias leans*
> *To home-felt pleasures and to gentle scenes;*
> Sweet images! which, wheresoe'er he be,
> Are at his heart; and such fidelity
> It is his darling passion to approve;—
> More brave for this, that he hath much to love."

Compare with this the end of the *Song at Brougham Castle*, where, at the words "alas! the fervent harper did not know—" the strain changes from the very spirit of chivalry to the gentleness of nature's calm. Nothing can be more characteristic of Wordsworth than contrasts like this. They teach us to remember that his accustomed mildness is the fruit of no indolent or sentimental peace; and that, on the other hand, when his counsels are

sternest, and "his voice is still for war," this is no voice of hardness or of vainglory, but the reluctant resolution of a heart which fain would yield itself to other energies, and have no message but of love.

There is one more point in which the character of Nelson has fallen in with one of the lessons which Wordsworth is never tired of enforcing, the lesson that virtue grows by the strenuousness of its exercise, that it gains strength as it wrestles with pain and difficulty, and converts the shocks of circumstance into an energy of its proper glow. The Happy Warrior is one,

> "Who, doomed to go in company with Pain,
> And Fear, and Bloodshed, miserable train!
> Turns his necessity to glorious gain;
> In face of these doth exercise a power
> Which is our human nature's highest dower;
> Controls them and subdues, transmutes, bereaves
> Of their bad influence, and their good receives;
> By objects which might force the soul to abate
> Her feeling, rendered more compassionate;"

and so further, in words which recall the womanly tenderness, the almost exaggerated feeling for others' pain, which showed itself memorably in face of the blazing *Orient*, and in the harbour at Teneriffe, and in the cockpit at Trafalgar.

In such lessons as these—such lessons as *The Happy Warrior* or the Patriotic Sonnets teach—there is, of course, little that is absolutely novel. We were already aware that the ideal hero should be as gentle as he is brave, that he should act always from the highest motives, nor greatly care for any reward save the consciousness of having done his duty. We were aware that the true strength of a nation is moral, and not material; that dominion which rests on mere military force is destined quickly to decay; that the tyrant, however admired and prosperous, is in reality despicable, and miserable, and alone; that the true man should face death itself rather than parley with dishonour. These truths are *admitted* in all ages; yet it is scarcely stretching language to say that they are *known* to but few men. Or at least, though in a great nation there be many who will act on them instinctively, and approve them by a self-surrendering faith, there are few who can so put them forth in speech as to bring them home with a fresh conviction and an added glow; who can sum up, like Æschylus, the contrast between Hellenic freedom and barbarian despotism in "one trump's peal that set all Greeks aflame;" can thrill, like Virgil, a world-wide empire with the recital of the august simplicities of early Rome.

To those who would know these things with a vital knowledge—a conviction which would remain unshaken were the whole world in arms for wrong—it is before all things necessary to strengthen the inner monitions by the companionship of these noble souls. And if a poet, by strong concentration of thought, by striving in

all things along the upward way, can leave us in a few pages, as it were, a summary of patriotism, a manual of national honour, he surely has his place among his country's benefactors not only by that kind of courtesy which the nation extends to men of letters of whom her masses take little heed, but with a title as assured as any warrior or statesman, and with no less direct a claim.

CHAPTER VIII.

CHILDREN.—LIFE AT RYDAL MOUNT.—"THE EXCURSION."

It may be well at this point to return to the quiet chronicle of the poet's life at Grasmere; where his cottage was becoming too small for an increasing family. His eldest son, John, was born in 1803; his eldest daughter, Dorothy or Dora, in 1804. Then came Thomas, born 1806; and Catherine, born 1808; and the list is ended by William, born 1810, and now (1880) the only survivor. In the spring of 1808 Wordsworth left Townend for Allan Bank—a more roomy but an uncomfortable house, at the north end of Grasmere. From thence he removed for a time, in 1811, to the Parsonage at Grasmere.

Wordsworth was the most affectionate of fathers, and allusions to his children occur frequently in his poetry. Dora—who was the delight of his later years—has been described at length in *The Triad*. Shorter and simpler, but more completely successful, is the picture of Catherine in the little poem which begins "Loving she is, and tractable, though wild," with its homely simile for childhood—its own existence sufficient to fill it with gladness:

> "As a faggot sparkles on the hearth
> Not less if unattended and alone
> Than when both young and old sit gathered round
> And take delight in its activity."

The next notice of this beloved child is in the sonnet, "Surprised by joy, impatient as the wind," written when she had already been removed from his side. She died in 1812, and was closely followed by her brother Thomas. Wordsworth's grief for these children was profound, violent, and lasting, to an extent which those who imagine him as not only calm but passionless might have some difficulty in believing. "Referring once," says his friend Mr. Aubrey de Vere, "to two young children of his who had died about *forty years* previously, he described the details of their illnesses with an exactness and an impetuosity of troubled excitement such as might have been expected if the bereavement had taken place but a few weeks before. The lapse of time seemed to have left the sorrow submerged indeed, but still in all its first freshness. Yet I afterwards heard that at the time of the illness, at least in the case of one of the two children, it was impossible to rouse his attention

to the danger. He chanced to be then under the immediate spell of one of those fits of poetical inspiration which descended on him like a cloud. Till the cloud had drifted, he could see nothing beyond."

This anecdote illustrates the fact, which to those who knew Wordsworth well was sufficiently obvious, that the characteristic calm of his writings was the result of no coldness of temperament, but of a deliberate philosophy. The pregnant force of his language in dealing with those dearest to him—his wife, his sister, his brother—is proof enough of this. The frequent allusions in his correspondence to the physical exhaustion brought on by the act of poetical composition indicate a frame which, though made robust by exercise and temperance, was by nature excitable rather than strong. And even in the direction in which we should least have expected it, there is reason to believe that there were capacities of feeling in him which never broke from his control. "Had I been a writer of love-poetry," he is reported to have said, "it would have been natural to me to write it with a degree of warmth which could hardly have been approved by my principles, and which might have been undesirable for the reader."

Wordsworth's paternal feelings, at any rate, were, as has been said, exceptionally strong; and the impossibility of remaining in a house filled with sorrowful memories rendered him doubly anxious to obtain a permanent home. "The house which I have for some time occupied," he writes to Lord Lonsdale, in January, 1813, "is the Parsonage of Grasmere. It stands close by the churchyard, and I have found it absolutely necessary that we should quit a place which, by recalling to our minds at every moment the losses we have sustained in the course of the last year, would grievously retard our progress towards that tranquillity which it is our duty to aim at." It happened that Rydal Mount became vacant at this moment, and in the spring of 1813 the Wordsworths migrated to this their favourite and last abode.

Rydal Mount has probably been oftener described than any other English poet's home since Shakspeare; and few homes, certainly, have been moulded into such close accordance with their inmates' nature. The house, which has been altered since Wordsworth's day, stands, looking southward, on the rocky side of Nab Scar, above Rydal Lake. The garden was described by Bishop Wordsworth immediately after his uncle's death, while every terrace-walk and flowering alley spoke of the poet's loving care. He tells of the "tall ash-tree, in which a thrush has sung, for hours together, during many years;" of the "laburnum in which the osier cage of the doves was hung;" of the stone steps "in the interstices of which grow the yellow flowering poppy, and the wild geranium or Poor Robin"—

> "Gay
> With his red stalks upon a sunny day."

And then of the terraces—one levelled for Miss Fenwick's use, and

welcome to himself in aged years; and one ascending, and leading to the "far terrace" on the mountain's side, where the poet was wont to murmur his verses as they came. Within the house were disposed his simple treasures: the ancestral almery, on which the names of unknown Wordsworths may be deciphered still; Sir George Beaumont's pictures of "The White Doe of Rylstone" and "The Thorn," and the cuckoo clock which brought vernal thoughts to cheer the sleepless bed of age, and which sounded its noonday summons when his spirit fled.

Wordsworth's worldly fortunes, as if by some benignant guardianship of Providence, were at all times proportioned to his successive needs. About the date of his removal to Rydal (in March, 1813) he was appointed, through Lord Lonsdale's interest, to the distributorship of stamps for the county of Westmoreland, to which office the same post for Cumberland was afterwards added. He held this post till August, 1842, when he resigned it without a retiring pension, and it was conferred on his second son. He was allowed to reside at Rydal, which was counted as a suburb of Ambleside; and as the duties of the place were light, and mainly performed by a most competent and devoted clerk, there was no drawback to the advantage of an increase of income which released him from anxiety as to the future. A more lucrative office—the collectorship of Whitehaven—was subsequently offered to him; but he declined it, "nor would exchange his Sabine valley for riches and a load of care."

Though Wordsworth's life at Rydal was a retired one, it was not that of a recluse. As years went on he became more and more recognized as a centre of spiritual strength and illumination, and was sought not only by those who were already his neighbours, but by some who became so mainly for his sake. Southey at Keswick was a valued friend, though Wordsworth did not greatly esteem him as a poet. De Quincey, originally attracted to the district by admiration for Wordsworth, remained there for many years, and poured forth a criticism strangely compounded of the utterances of the hero-worshipper and the *valet-de-chambre*. Professor Wilson, of the *Noctes Ambrosianæ*, never showed, perhaps, to so much advantage as when he walked by the side of the master whose greatness he was one of the first to detect. Dr. Arnold of Rugby made the neighbouring home at Fox How a focus of warm affections and of intellectual life. And Hartley Coleridge, whose fairy childhood had inspired one of Wordsworth's happiest pieces, continued to lead among the dales of Westmoreland a life which showed how much of genius and goodness a single weakness can nullify.

Other friends there were, too, less known to fame, but of exceptional powers of appreciation and sympathy. The names of Mrs. Fletcher and her daughters, Lady Richardson and Mrs. Davy, should not be omitted in any record of the poet's life at Rydal. And many humbler neighbours may be recognised in the characters of the *Excursion* and other poems. The *Wanderer*, indeed, is a picture of Wordsworth himself—"an idea," as he says, "of what

I fancied my own character might have become in his circumstances." But the *Solitary* was suggested by a broken man who took refuge in Grasmere from the world in which he had found no peace; and the characters described as lying in the churchyard among the mountains are almost all of them portraits. The clergyman and his family described in Book VII. were among the poet's principal associates in the vale of Grasmere. "There was much talent in the family," says Wordsworth, in the memoranda dictated to Miss Fenwick; "and the eldest son was distinguished for poetical talent, of which a specimen is given in my Notes to the *Sonnets on the Duddon*. Once when, in our cottage at Townend, I was talking with him about poetry in the course of our conversation I presumed to find fault with the versification of Pope, of whom he was an enthusiastic admirer. He defended him with a warmth that indicated much irritation; nevertheless, I could not abandon my point, and said, 'In compass and variety of sound your own versification surpasses his.' Never shall I forget the change of his countenance and tone of voice. The storm was laid in a moment; he no longer disputed my judgment; and I passed immediately in his mind, no doubt, for as great a critic as ever lived."

It was with personages simple and unromantic as these that Wordsworth filled the canvas of his longest poem. Judged by ordinary standards the *Excursion* appears an epic without action, and with two heroes, the Pastor and the Wanderer, whose characters are identical. Its form is cumbrous in the extreme, and large tracts of it have little claim to the name of poetry. Wordsworth compares the *Excursion* to a temple of which his smaller poems form subsidiary shrines; but the reader will more often liken the small poems to gems, and the *Excursion* to the rock from which they were extracted. The long poem contains, indeed, magnificent passages, but as a whole it is a diffused description of scenery which the poet has elsewhere caught in brighter glimpses; a diffused statement of hopes and beliefs which have crystallized more exquisitely elsewhere round moments of inspiring emotion. The *Excursion*, in short, has the drawbacks of a didactic poem as compared with lyrical poems; but, judged as a didactic poem, it has the advantage of containing teaching of true and permanent value.

I shall not attempt to deduce a settled scheme of philosophy from these discourses among the mountains. I would urge only that, as a guide to conduct, Wordsworth's precepts are not in themselves either unintelligible or visionary. For whereas some moralists would have us amend Nature, and others bid us follow her, there is apt to be something impracticable in the first maxim, and something vague in the second. Asceticism, quietism, enthusiasm, ecstasy—all systems which imply an unnatural repression or an unnatural excitation of our faculties—are ill-suited for the mass of mankind. And on the other hand, if we are told to follow nature, to develop our original character, we are too often in doubt as to which of our conflicting instincts to follow, what part of our complex nature to accept as our regulating self. But Words-

worth, while impressing on us conformity to nature as the rule of life, suggests a text of such conformity which can be practically applied. "The child is father of the man"—in the words which stand as introduction to his poetical works, and Wordsworth holds that the instincts and pleasures of a healthy childhood sufficiently indicate the lines on which our maturer character should be formed. The joy which began in the mere sense of existence should be maintained by hopeful faith; the simplicity which began in inexperience should be recovered by meditation; the love which originated in the family circle should expand itself over the race of men. And the calming and elevating influence of Nature—which to Wordsworth's memory seemed the inseparable concomitant of childish years—should be constantly invoked throughout life to keep the heart fresh and the eyes open to the mysteries discernible through her radiant veil. In a word, the family affections, if duly fostered, the influences of Nature, if duly sought, with some knowledge of the best books, are material enough to "build up our moral being" and to outweigh the less deep-seated impulses which prompt to wrong-doing.

If, then, surrounding influences make so decisive a difference in man's moral lot, what are we to say of those who never had the chance of receiving those influences aright; who are reared, with little parental supervision, in smoky cities, and spend their lives in confined and monotonous labour? One of the most impressive passages in the *Excursion* is an indignant complaint of the injustice thus done to the factory child. Wordsworth was no fanatical opponent of manufacturing industry. He had intimate friends among manufacturers; and in one of his letters he speaks of promising himself much pleasure from witnessing the increased regard for the welfare of factory hands of which one of these friends had set the example. But he never lost sight of the fact that the life of the mill-hand is an anomaly—is a life not in the order of nature, and which requires to be justified by manifest necessity and by continuous care. The question to what extent we may acquiesce in the continuance of a low order of human beings, existing for our enjoyment rather than for their own, may be answered with plausibility in very different tones; from the Communist who cannot acquiesce in the inferiority of any man's position to any other's, to the philosopher who holds that mankind has made the most eminent progress when a few chosen individuals have been supported in easy brilliancy by a population of serfs or slaves. Wordsworth's answer to this question is at once conservative and philanthropic. He holds to the distinction of classes, and thus admits a difference in the fulness and value of human lots. But he will not consent to any social arrangement which implies a necessary *moral* inferiority in any section of the body politic; and he esteems it the statesman's first duty to provide that all citizens shall be placed under conditions of life which, however humble, shall not be unfavourable to virtue.

His views on national education, which at first sight appear so

inconsistent, depend on the same conception of national welfare. Wordsworth was one of the earliest and most emphatic proclaimers of the duty of the State in this respect. The lines in which he insists that every child ought to be taught to read are, indeed, often quoted as an example of the moralising baldness of much of his blank verse. But, on the other hand, when a great impulse was given to education (1820–30) by Bell and Lancaster, by the introduction of what was called the "Madras system" of tuition by pupil-teachers, and the spread of infant schools, Wordsworth was found unexpectedly in the opposite camp. Considering as he did all mental requirements as entirely subsidiary to moral progress, and in themselves of very little value, he objected to a system which, instead of confining itself to reading—that indispensable channel of moral nutriment—aimed at communicating knowledge as varied and advanced as time and funds would allow. He objected to the dissociation of school and home life—to that relegation of domestic interests and duties to the background, which large and highly-organised schools, and teachers much above the home level, must necessarily involve. And yet more strongly, and as it may still seem to many minds, with convincing reason, he objected to an eleemosynary system, which "precludes the poor mother from the strongest motive human nature can be actuated by for industry, for forethought, and self-denial." "The Spartan," he said, "and other ancient communities, might disregard domestic ties, because they had the substitution of country, which we cannot have. Our course is to supplant domestic attachments, without the possibility of substituting others more capacious. What can grow out of it but selfishness?" The half-century which has elapsed since Wordsworth wrote these words has evidently altered the state of the question. It has impressed on us the paramount necessity of national education, for reasons political and social too well known to repeat. But it may be feared that it has also shifted the incidence of Wordsworth's arguments in a more sinister manner, by vastly increasing the number of those homes where domestic influence of the kind which the poet saw around him at Rydal is altogether wanting, and school is the best avenue even to moral well-being. "Heaven and hell," he writes in 1808, "are scarcely more different from each other than Sheffield and Manchester, &c., differ from the plains and valleys of Surrey, Essex, Cumberland, or Westmoreland." It is to be feared, indeed, that even "the plains and valleys of Surrey and Essex" contain many cottages whose spiritual and sanitary conditions fall far short of the poet's ideal. But it is of course in the great and growing centres of population that the dangers which he dreads have come upon us in their most aggravated form. And so long as there are in England so many homes to which parental care and the influences of nature are alike unknown, no protest in favour of the paramount importance of these primary agencies in the formation of character can be regarded as altogether out of date.

With such severe and almost prosaic themes is the greater part

of the *Excursion* occupied. Yet the poem is far from being composed throughout in a prosaic spirit. "Of its bones is coral made;" its arguments and theories have lain long in Wordsworth's mind, and have accreted to themselves a rich investiture of observation and feeling. Some of its passages rank among the poet's highest flights. Such is the passage in Book I. describing the boy's rapture at sunrise; and a picture of a sunset at the close of the same book. Such is the opening of Book IV.; and the passage describing the wild joy of roaming through a mountain storm; and the metaphor in the same book which compares the mind's power of transfiguring the obstacles which beset her, with the glory into which the moon incorporates the umbrage that would intercept her beams.

It would scarcely be possible at the present day that a work containing such striking passages, and so much of substance and elevation—however out of keeping it might be with the ruling taste of the day—should appear without receiving careful study from many quarters and warm appreciation in some recognised organs of opinion. Criticism in Wordsworth's day was both less competent and less conscientious, and the famous "this will never do" of Jeffrey in the *Edinburgh Review* was by no means an extreme specimen of the general tone in which the work was received. The judgment of the reviewers influenced popular taste; and the book was as decided a pecuniary failure as Wordsworth's previous ventures had been.

And here, perhaps, is a fit occasion to speak of that strangely violent detraction and abuse which formed so large an ingredient in Wordsworth's life—or, rather, of that which is the only element of permanent interest in such a matter—his manner of receiving and replying to it. No writer, probably, who has afterwards achieved a reputation at all like Wordsworth's, has been so long represented by reviewers as purely ridiculous. And in Wordsworth's manner of acceptance of this fact we may discern all the strength, and something of the stiffness, of his nature; we may recognize an almost, but not quite, ideal attitude under the shafts of unmerited obloquy. For he who thus is arrogantly censured should remember both the dignity and the frailty of man; he should wholly forgive, and almost wholly forget; but, nevertheless, should retain such serviceable hints as almost any criticism, however harsh or reckless, can afford, and go on his way with no bitter broodings, but yet (to use Wordsworth's expression in another context) "with a melancholy in the soul, a sinking inward into ourselves from thought to thought, a steady remonstrance, and a high resolve."

How far his own self-assertion may becomingly be carried in reply, is another and a delicate question. There is almost necessarily something distasteful to us not only in self-praise but even in a thorough self-appreciation. We desire of the ideal character that his faculties of admiration should be, as it were, absorbed in an eager perception of the merits of others—that a kind of shrinking delicacy should prevent him from appraising his own achieve-

ments with a similar care. Often, indeed, there is something most winning in a touch of humourous blindness: "Well, Miss Sophia, and how do *you* like the *Lady of the Lake?*" "Oh, I've not read it: papa says there's nothing so bad for young people as reading bad poetry."

But there are circumstances under which this graceful absence of self-consciousness can no longer be maintained. When a man believes that he has a message to deliver that vitally concerns mankind, and when that message is received with contempt and apathy, he is necessarily driven back upon himself; he is forced to consider whether what he has to say is after all so important, and whether his mode of saying it be right and adequate. A necessity of this kind was forced upon both Shelley and Wordsworth. Shelley—the very type of self-forgetful enthusiasm—was driven at last by the world's treatment of him into a series of moods sometimes bitter and sometimes self-distrustful—into a sense of aloofness and detachment from the mass of men, which the poet who would fain improve and exalt them should do his utmost not to feel. On Wordsworth's more stubborn nature the effect produced by many years of detraction was of a different kind. Naturally introspective, he was driven by abuse and ridicule into taking stock of himself more frequently and more laboriously than ever. He formed an estimate of himself and his writings which was, on the whole (as will now be generally admitted), a just one; and this view he expressed when occasion offered—in sober language, indeed, but with calm conviction, and with precisely the same air of speaking from undoubted knowledge as when he described the beauty of Cumbrian mountains or the virtue of Cumbrian homes.

"It is impossible," he wrote to Lady Beaumont in 1807, "that any expectations can be lower than mine concerning the immediate effect of this little work upon what is called the public. I do not here take into consideration the envy and malevolence, and all the bad passions which always stand in the way of a work of any merit from a living poet; but merely think of the pure, absolute, honest ignorance in which all worldlings, of every rank and situation, must be enveloped, with respect to the thoughts, feelings, and images on which the life of my poems depends. The things which I have taken, whether from within or without, what have they to do with routs, dinners, morning calls, hurry from door to door, from street to street, on foot or in carriage; with Mr. Pitt or Mr. Fox, Mr. Paul or Sir Francis Burdett, the Westminster election or the borough of Honiton? In a word—for I cannot stop to make my way through the hurry of images that present themselves to me—what have they to do with endless talking about things that nobody cares anything for, except as far as their own vanity is concerned, and this with persons they care nothing for, but as their vanity or *selfishness* is concerned? What have they to do (to say all at once) with a life without love? In such a life there can be no thought; for we have no thought (save thoughts of pain), but as far as we have love and admiration.

"It is an awful truth, that there neither is nor can be any genuine enjoyment of poetry among nineteen out of twenty of those persons who live, or wish to live, in the broad light of the world—among those who either are, or are striving to make themselves, people of consideration in society. This is a truth, and an awful one; because to be incapable of a feeling of poetry, in my sense of the word, is to be without love of human nature and reverence for God.

"Upon this I shall insist elsewhere; at present let me confine myself to my object, which is to make you, my dear friend, as easy-hearted as myself with respect to these poems. Trouble not yourself upon their present reception. Of what moment is that compared with what I trust is their destiny?—to console the afflicted; to add sunshine to daylight, by making the happy happier; to teach the young and the gracious of every age to see, to think, and feel, and therefore to become more actively and securely virtuous; this is their office, which I trust they will faithfully perform long after we (that is, all that is mortal of us) are mouldered in our graves."

Such words as these come with dignity from the mouth of a man like Wordsworth when he has been, as it were, driven to bay—when he is consoling an intimate friend, distressed at the torrent of ridicule which, as she fears, must sweep his self-confidence and his purposes away. He may be permitted to assure her that "my ears are stone-dead to this idle buzz, and my flesh as insensible as iron to these petty stings, and to accompany his assurance with a reasoned statement of the grounds of his unshaken hopes.

We feel, however, that such an expression of self-reliance on the part of a great man should be accompanied with some proof that no conceit or impatience is mixed with his steadfast calm. If he believes the public to be really unable to appreciate himself, he must show no surprise when they admire his inferiors; he must remember that the case would be far worse if they admired no one at all. Nor must he descend from his own unpopular merits on the plea that after catching the public attention by what is bad he will retain it for what is good. If he is so sure that he is in the right he can afford to wait and let the world come round to him. Wordsworth's conduct satisfies both these tests. It is, indeed, curious to observe how much abuse this inoffensive recluse received, and how absolutely he avoided returning it. Byron, for instance, must have seemed in his eyes guilty of something far more injurious to mankind than "a drowsy, frowsy poem, called the *Excursion*," could possibly appear. But, except in one or two private letters, Wordsworth has never alluded to Byron at all. Shelley's lampoon—a singular instance of the random blows of a noble spirit, striking at what, if better understood, it would eagerly have revered—Wordsworth seems never to have read. Nor did the violent attacks of the *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly Reviews* provoke him to any rejoinder. To "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers"—leagued against him as their common prey—he op-

posed a dignified silence; and the only moral injury which he derived from their assaults lay in that sense of the absence of trustworthy external criticism which led him to treat everything which he had once written down as if it were a special revelation, and to insist with equal earnestness on his most trifling as on his most important pieces—on *Goody Blake* and *The Idiot Boy* as on *The Cuckoo* or *The Daffodils*. The sense of humour is apt to be the first grace which is lost under persecution; and much of Wordsworth's heaviness and stiff exposition of commonplaces is to be traced to a feeling which he could scarcely avoid, that "all day long he had lifted up his voice to a perverse and gainsaying generation."

To the pecuniary loss inflicted on him by these adverse criticisms he was justly sensible. He was far from expecting, or even desiring, to be widely popular or to make a rapid fortune; but he felt that the labourer was worthy of his hire, and that the devotion of years to literature should have been met with some moderate degree of the usual form of recognition which the world accords to those who work for it. In 1820 he speaks of "the whole of my returns from the writing trade not amounting to seven-score pounds;" and as late as 1843, when at the height of his fame, he was not ashamed of confessing the importance which he had always attached to this particular.

"So sensible am I," he says, "of the deficiencies in all that I write, and so far does everything that I attempt fall short of what I wish it to be, that even private publication, if such a term may be allowed, requires more resolution than I can command. I have written to give vent to my own mind, and not without hope that, some time or other, kindred minds might benefit by my labours; but I am inclined to believe I should never have ventured to send forth any verses of mine to the world, if it had not been done on the pressure of personal occasions. Had I been a rich man, my productions, like this *Epistle*, the *Tragedy of the Borderers*, &c., would most likely have been confined to manuscript."

An interesting passage from an unpublished letter of Miss Wordsworth's on the *White Doe of Rylstone*, confirms this statement:

"My brother was very much pleased with your frankness in telling us that you did not perfectly like his poem. He wishes to know what your feelings were—whether the tale itself did not interest you—or whether you could not enter into the conception of Emily's character, or take delight in that visionary communion which is supposed to have existed between her and the Doe. Do not fear to give him pain. He is far too much accustomed to be abused to receive pain from it (at least as far as he himself is concerned). My reason for asking you these questions is, that some of our friends, who are equal admirers of the *White Doe* and of my brother's published poems, think that *this* poem will sell on account of the story; that is, that the story will bear up those points which are above the level of the public taste; whereas, the two last volumes—except by a few solitary individuals, who are passionately devoted to my brother's works—are abused by wholesale.

"Now, as his sole object in publishing this poem at present would be for the sake of the money, he would not publish it if he did not think, from the several judgments of his friends, that it would be likely to have a sale. He has no pleasure in publishing—he even detests it; and if it were not that he is *not* over-wealthy, he would leave all his works to be published after his death. William himself is sure that the *White Doe* will not sell or be admired, except by a very few, at first; and only yields to Mary's entreaties and mine. We are determined, however, if we are deceived this time, to let him have his own way in future."

These passages must be taken, no doubt, as representing one aspect only of the poet's impulses in the matter. With his deep conviction of the world's real, though unrecognised, need of a pure vein of poetry, we can hardly imagine him as permanently satisfied to defer his own contribution till after his death. Yet we may certainly believe that the need of money helped him to overcome much diffidence as to publication; and we may discern something dignified in his frank avowal of this when it is taken in connexion with his scrupulous abstinence from any attempt to win the suffrages of the multitude by means unworthy of his high vocation. He could never, indeed, have written poems which could have vied in immediate popularity with those of Byron or Scott. But the criticisms on the first edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* must have shown him that a slight alteration of method—nay, even the excision of a few pages in each volume, pages certain to be loudly objected to—would have made a marked difference in the sale and its proceeds. From this point of view, even poems which we may now feel to have been needlessly puerile and grotesque acquire a certain impressiveness, when we recognise that the theory which demanded their composition was one which their author was willing to uphold at the cost of some years of real physical privation, and of the postponement for a generation of his legitimate fame.

CHAPTER IX.

POETICAL DICTION.—"LAODAMIA."—"EVENING ODE."

THE *Excursion* appeared in 1814, and in the course of the next year Wordsworth republished his minor poems, so arranged as to indicate the faculty of the mind which he considered to have been predominant in the composition of each. To most readers this disposition has always seemed somewhat arbitrary; and it was once suggested to Wordsworth that a chronological arrangement would be better. The manner in which Wordsworth met this proposal indicated the limit of his absorption in himself—his real desire only to dwell on his own feelings in such a way as might make them useful to others. For he rejected the plan as too egoistical—as emphasizing the succession of moods in the poet's mind, rather than the lessons which those moods could teach. His objection points, at any rate, to a real danger which any man's simplicity of character incurs by dwelling too attentively on the changing phases of his own thought. But after the writer's death the historical spirit will demand that poems, like other artistic products, should be disposed for the most part in the order of time.

In a preface to this edition of 1815, and a supplementary essay, he developed the theory on poetry already set forth in a well-known preface to the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*. Much of the matter of these essays, received at the time with contemptuous aversion, is now accepted as truth; and few compositions of equal length contains so much of vigorous criticism and sound reflection. It is only when they generalise too confidently that they are in danger of misleading us; for all expositions of the art and practice of poetry must necessarily be incomplete. Poetry, like all the arts, is essentially a "mystery." Its charm depends upon qualities which we can neither define accurately, nor reduce to rule, nor create again at pleasure. Mankind, however, are unwilling to admit this; and they endeavour from time to time to persuade themselves that they have discovered the rules which will enable them to produce the desired effect. And so much of the effect *can* thus be reproduced, that it is often possible to believe for a time that the problem has been solved. Pope, to take the instance which was prominent in Wordsworth's mind, was by general admission a poet. But his success seemed to depend on imitable peculiarities; and Pope's imitators were so like Pope that it was

hard to draw a line and say where they ceased to be poets. At last, however, this imitative school began to prove too much. If all the insipid verses which they wrote were poetry, what was the use of writing poetry at all? A reaction succeeded, which asserted that poetry depends on emotion, and not on polish; that it consists precisely in those things which frigid imitators lack. Cowper, Burns, and Crabbe (especially in his *Sir Eustace Grey*) had preceded Wordsworth as leaders of this reaction. But they had acted half unconsciously, or had even at times themselves attempted to copy the very style which they were superseding.

Wordsworth, too, began with a tendency to imitate Pope, but only in the school exercises which he wrote as a boy. Poetry soon became to him the expression of his own deep and simple feelings; and then he rebelled against rhetoric and unreality, and found for himself a directer and truer voice. "I have proposed to myself to imitate and, as far as is possible, to adopt the very language of men. . . . I have taken as much pains to avoid what is usually called poetic diction as others ordinarily take to produce it." And he erected this practice into a general principle in the following passage:

"I do not doubt that it may be safely affirmed that there neither is, nor can be, any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition. We are fond of tracing the resemblance between poetry and painting, and accordingly we call them sisters; but where shall we find bonds of connexion sufficiently strict to typify the affinity between metrical and prose composition? If it be affirmed that rhyme and metrical arrangement of themselves constitute a distinction which overturns what I have been saying on the strict affinity of metrical language with that of prose, and paves the way for other artificial distinctions which the mind voluntarily admits, I answer that the language of such poetry as I am recommending is, as far as possible, a selection of the language really spoken by men; that this selection, wherever it is made with true taste and feeling, will of itself form a distinction far greater than would at first be imagined, and will entirely separate the composition from the vulgarity and meanness of ordinary life; and if metre be superadded thereto, I believe that a dissimilitude will be produced altogether sufficient for the gratification of a rational mind. What other distinction would we have? whence is it to come? and where is it to exist?"

There is a definiteness and simplicity about this description of poetry which may well make us wonder why this precious thing (producible, apparently, as easily as Pope's imitators supposed, although by means different from theirs) is not offered to us by more persons, and of better quality. And it will not be hard to show that a good poetical style must possess certain characteristics which, although something like them must exist in a good prose style, are carried in poetry to a pitch so much higher as virtually to need a specific faculty for their successful production.

To illustrate the inadequacy of Wordsworth's theory to explain the merits of his own poetry, I select a stanza from one of his simplest and most characteristic poems, *The Affliction of Margaret*:

"Perhaps some dungeon hears thee groan,
Maimed, mangled by inhuman men,
Or thou upon a Desert thrown
Inheritest the lion's Den;
Or hast been summoned to the Deep,
Thou, thou and all thy mates, to keep
An incommunicable sleep."

These lines, supposed to be uttered by "a poor widow at Penrith," afford a fair illustration of what Wordsworth calls "the language really spoken by men," with "metre superadded." "What other distinction from prose," he asks, "would we have?" We may answer that we would have what he has actually given us, viz., an appropriate and attractive music, lying both on the rhythm and in the actual sound of the words used—a music whose complexity may be indicated here by drawing out some of its elements in detail, at the risk of appearing pedantic and technical. We observe then, (*a*), that the general movement of the lines is unusually slow. They contain a very large proportion of strong accents and long vowels, to suit the tone of deep and despairing sorrow. In six places only out of twenty-eight is the accent weak where it might be expected to be strong (in the second syllable, namely, of the iambic foot), and in each of these cases the omission of a possible accent throws greater weight on the next succeeding accent—on the accents, that is to say, contained in the words inhuman, desert, lion, summoned, deep, and sleep. (*b*) The first four lines contain subtle alliterations of the letters d, h, m, and th. In this connexion it should be remembered that when consonants are thus repeated at the beginning of syllables, those syllables need not be at the beginning of words; and further, that repetitions scarcely more numerous than chance alone would have occasioned may be so placed by the poet as to produce a strongly-felt effect. If any one doubts the effectiveness of the unobvious alliterations here insisted on, let him read (1) "jungle" for "desert," (2) "maybe" for "perhaps," (3) "tortured" for "mangled," (4) "blown" for "thrown," and he will become sensible of the lack of the metrical support which the existing consonants give one another. The three last lines contain one or two similar alliterations on which I need not dwell. (*c*) The words *inheritest* and *summoned* are by no means such as "a poor widow," even at Penrith, would employ; they are used to intensify the imagined relation which connects the missing man with (1) the wild beasts who surround him, and (2) the invisible Power which leads; so that something mysterious and awful is added to his fate. (*d*) This impression is heightened by the use of the word *incommunicable* in an unusual sense, "incapable of being communicated *with*," instead of "incapable of being communicated:" while (*e*) the expression "to keep an incommunicable sleep" for "to lie dead," gives dignity to the occasion by carrying the mind back along a train of literary associations of which the well-known ἀτέρμονα νήγρετον ὕπνον of Moschus may be taken as the type.

We must not, of course, suppose that Wordsworth consciously sought these alliterations, arranged these accents, resolved to introduce an unusual word in the last line, or hunted for a classical allusion. But what the poet's brain does not do consciously it does unconsciously; a selective action is going on in its recesses simultaneously with the overt train of thought, and on the degree of this unconscious suggestiveness the richness and melody of the poetry will depend.

No rules can secure the attainment of these effects; and the very same artifices which are delightful when used by one man seem mechanical and offensive when used by another. Nor is it by any means always the case that the man who can most delicately appreciate the melody of the poetry of others will be able to produce similar melody himself. Nay, even if he can produce it one year, it by no means follows that he will be able to produce it the next. Of all qualifications for writing poetry this inventive music is the most arbitrarily distributed, and the most evanescent. But it is the more important to dwell on its necessity, inasmuch as both good and bad poets are tempted to ignore it. The good poet prefers to ascribe his success to higher qualities; to his imagination, elevation of thought, descriptive faculty. The bad poet can more easily urge that his thoughts are too advanced for mankind to appreciate than that his melody is too sweet for their ears to catch. And when the gift vanishes no poet is willing to confess that it is gone; so humiliating is it to lose power over mankind by the loss of something which seems quite independent of intellect or character. And yet so it is. For some twenty years at most (1798–1818) Wordsworth possessed this gift of melody. During those years he wrote works which profoundly influenced mankind. The gift then left him; he continued as wise and as earnest as ever, but his poems had no longer any potency, nor his existence much public importance.

Humiliating as such reflections may seem, they are in accordance with actual experience in all branches of art. The fact is that the pleasures which art gives us are complex in the extreme. We are always disposed to dwell on such of their elements as are explicable, and can in some way be traced to moral or intellectual sources. But they contain also other elements which are inexplicable, non-moral, and non-intellectual, and which render most of our attempted explanations of artistic merit so incomplete as to be practically misleading. Among such incomplete explanations Wordsworth's essays must certainly be ranked. It would not be safe for any man to believe that he had produced true poetry because he had fulfilled the conditions which Wordsworth lays down. But the essays effected what is perhaps as much as the writer on art can fairly hope to accomplish. They placed in a striking light that side of the subject which had been too long ignored; they aided in recalling an art which had become conventional and fantastic into the normal current of English thought and speech.

It may be added that, both in doctrine and practice, Words

worth exhibits a progressive reaction from the extreme views with which he starts towards that common vein of good sense and sound judgment which may be traced back to Horace, Longinus, and Aristotle. His first preface is violently polemic. He attacks with reason that conception of the sublime and beautiful which is represented by Dryden's picture of "Cortes alone in his night-gown," remarking that "the mountains seem to nod their drowsy heads." But the only example of true poetry which he sees fit to adduce in contrast consists in a stanza from the *Babes in the Wood*. In his preface of 1815 he is not less severe on false sentiment and false observation. But his views of the complexity and dignity of poetry have been much developed, and he is willing now to draw his favourable instances from Shakspeare, Milton, Virgil, and himself.

His own practice underwent a corresponding change. It is only to a few poems of his earlier years that the famous parody of the *Rejected Addresses* fairly applies—

> "My father's walls are made of brick,
> But not so tall and not so thick
> As these; and goodness me!
> My father's beams are made of wood,
> But never, never half so good
> As those that now I see!"

Lines something like these might have occurred in *The Thorn* or *The Idiot Boy*. Nothing could be more different from the style of the sonnets, or of the *Ode to Duty*, or of *Laodamia*. And yet both the simplicity of the earlier and the pomp of the later poems were almost always noble; nor is the transition from the one style to the other a perplexing or abnormal thing. For all sincere styles are congruous to one another, whether they be adorned or no, as all high natures are congruous to one another, whether in the garb of peasant or of prince. What is incongruous to both is affectation, vulgarity, egoism; and while the noble style can be interchangeably childlike or magnificent, as its theme requires, the ignoble can neither simplify itself into purity nor deck itself into grandeur.

It need not, therefore, surprise us to find the classical models becoming more and more dominant in Wordsworth's mind, till the poet of *Poor Susan* and *The Cuckoo* spends months over the attempt to translate the *Æneid*—to win the secret of that style which he placed at the head of all poetic styles, and of those verses which "wind," as he says, "with the majesty of the Conscript Fathers entering the Senate-house in solemn possession," and enveloped in their imperial melancholy all the sorrows and the fates of man.

And, indeed, so tranquil and uniform was the life which we are now retracing, and at the same time so receptive of any noble influence which opportunity might bring, that a real epoch is marked in Wordsworth's poetical career by the mere rereading of some Latin authors in 1814–16 with a view to preparing his eldest son

for the University. Among the poets whom he thus studied was one in whom he might seem to discern his own spirit endowed with grander proportions, and meditating on sadder fates. Among the poets of the battlefield, of the study, of the boudoir, he encountered the first Priest of Nature, the first poet in Europe who had deliberately shunned the life of courts and cities for the mere joy in Nature's presence, for "sweet Parthenope and the fields beside Vesevus' hill."

There are, indeed, passages in the *Georgics* so Wordsworthian, as we now call it, in tone, that it is hard to realise what centuries separated them from the *Sonnet to Lady Beaumont* or from *Ruth*. Such, for instance, is the picture of the Corycian old man, who had made himself independent of the seasons by his gardening skill, so that "when gloomy winter was still rending the stones with frost, still curbing with ice the rivers' onward flow, he even then was plucking the soft hyacinth's bloom, and chid the tardy summer and delaying airs of spring." Such, again, is the passage where the poet breaks from the glories of successful industry into the delight of watching the great processes which nature accomplishes untutored and alone, "the joy of gazing on Cytorus waving with box-wood, and on forests of Narycian pine, on tracts that never felt the harrow, nor knew the care of man."

Such thoughts as these the Roman and the English poet had in common—the heritage of untarnished souls.

> "I asked; 'twas whispered: The device
> To each and all might well belong:
> It is the Spirit of Paradise
> That prompts such work, a Spirit strong,
> That gives to all the self-same bent
> Where life is wise and innocent."

It is not only in tenderness but in dignity that the "wise and innocent" are wont to be at one. Strong in tranquillity, they can intervene amid great emotions with a master's voice, and project on the storm of passion the clear light of their unchanging calm. And thus it was that the study of Virgil, and especially of Virgil's solemn picture of the Underworld, prompted in Wordsworth's mind the most majestic of his poems, his one great utterance on heroic love.

He had as yet written little on any such topic as this. At Goslar he had composed the poems on *Lucy* to which allusion has already been made. And after his happy marriage he had painted in one of the best known of his poems the sweet transitions of wedded love, as it moves on from the first shock and agitation of the encounter of predestined souls through all tendernesses of intimate affection into a pervading permanency and calm. Scattered, moreover, throughout his poems are several passages in which the passion is treated with similar force and truth. The poem which begins "'Tis said that some have died for love" depicts the enduring poignancy of bereavement with an "iron pathos" that is al-

most too strong for art. And something of the same power of clinging attachment is shown in the sonnet where the poet is stung with the thought that "even for the least division of an hour" he has taken pleasure in the life around him, without the accustomed tacit reference to one who has passed away. There is a brighter touch of constancy in that other sonnet where, after letting his fancy play over a glad imaginary past, he turns to his wife, ashamed that even in so vague a vision he could have shaped for himself a solitary joy:

> "Let *her* be comprehended in the frame
> Of these illusions, or they please no more."

In later years the two sonnets on his wife's picture set on that love the consecration of faithful age; and there are those who can recall his look as he gazed on the picture and tried to recognise in that aged face the Beloved who to him was ever young and fair—a look as of one dwelling in life-long affections with the unquestioning single-heartedness of a child.

And here it might have been thought that as his experience ended, his power of description would have ended too. But it was not so. Under the powerful stimulus of the sixth *Æneid*—allusions to which pervade *Laodamia** throughout—with unusual labour, and by a strenuous effort of the imagination, Wordsworth was enabled to depict his own love *in excelsis*, to imagine what aspect it might have worn, if it had been its destiny to deny itself at some heroic call, and to confront with nobleness an extreme emergency, and to be victor (as Plato has it) in an Olympian contest of the soul. For, indeed, the "fervent, not ungovernable, love," which is the ideal that Protesilaus is sent to teach, is on a great scale the same affection which we have been considering in domesticity and peace; it is love considered not as a revolution but as a consummation; as a self-abandonment not to a laxer but to a sterner law; no longer as an invasive passion, but as the deliberate habit of the soul. It is that conception of love which springs into being in the last canto of Dante's *Purgatory*—which finds in English chivalry a noble voice—

> "I could not love thee, dear, so much,
> Loved I not honour more."

For, indeed (even as Plato says that Beauty is the splendour of Truth), so such a Love as this is the splendour of Virtue; it is the unexpected spark that flashes from self-forgetful soul to soul, it is man's standing evidence that he "must lose himself to find himself," and that only when the veil of his personality has lifted from around him can he recognise that he is already in heaven.

In a second poem inspired by this revived study of classical

* *Laodamia* should be read (as it is given in Mr. Matthew Arnold's admirable volume of selections) with the *earlier* conclusion: the *second* form is less satisfactory; and the *third*, with its sermonising tone, "thus all in vain exhorted and reproved," is worst of all.

antiquity Wordsworth has traced the career of Dion—the worthy pupil of Plato, the philosophic ruler of Syracuse, who allowed himself to shed blood unjustly, though for the public good, and was haunted by a spectre symbolical of this fatal error. At last Dion was assassinated, and the words in which the poet tells his fate seem to me to breathe the very triumph of philosophy, to paint with a touch the greatness of a spirit which makes of Death himself a deliverer, and has its strength in the unseen—

> So were the hopeless troubles, that involved
> The soul of Dion, instantly dissolved."

I can only compare these lines to that famous passage of Sophocles where the lamentations of the dying Œdipus are interrupted by the impatient summons of an unseen accompanying god. In both places the effect is the same—to present to us with striking brevity the contrast between the visible and the invisible presences that may stand about a man's last hour; for he may feel with the desolate Œdipus that "all I am has perished"—he may sink like Dion through inextricable sadness to a disastrous death, and then in a moment the transitory shall disappear and the essential shall be made plain, and from Dion's upright spirit the perplexities shall vanish away, and Œdipus, in the welcome of that unknown companionship, shall find his expiations over and his reward begun.

It is true, no doubt, that when Wordsworth wrote these poems he had lost something of the young inimitable charm which fills such pieces as the *Fountain* or the *Solitary Reaper*. His language is majestic, but it is no longer magical. And yet we cannot but feel that he has put into these poems something which he could not have put into the poems which preceded them; that they bear the impress of a soul which has added moral effort to poetic inspiration, and is mistress now of the acquired as well as of the innate virtue. For it is words like these that are the strength and stay of men; nor can their accent of lofty earnestness be simulated by the writer's art. Literary skill may deceive the reader who seeks a literary pleasure alone; and he to whom these strong consolations are a mere imaginative luxury may be uncertain or indifferent out of what heart they come. But those who need them know; spirits that hunger after righteousness discern their proper food; there is no fear lest they confound the sentimental and superficial with those weighty utterances of moral truth which are the most precious legacy that a man can leave to mankind.

Thus far, then, I must hold that, although much of grace had already vanished, there was on the whole a progress and elevation in the mind of him of whom we treat. But the culminating point is here. After this—whatever ripening process may have been at work unseen—what is chiefly visible is the slow stiffening of the imaginative power, the slow withdrawal of the insight into the soul of things, and a descent—ἀβληχρὸς μάλα τοῖος—"soft as soft can be," to the euthanasy of a death that was like sleep.

The impression produced by Wordsworth's reperusal of Virgil in 1814–16 was a deep and lasting one. In 1829–30 he devoted much time and labour to a translation of the first three books of the *Æneid*, and it is interesting to note the gradual modification of his views as to the true method of rendering poetry.

"I have long been persuaded," he writes to Lord Lonsdale in 1829, "that Milton formed his blank verse upon the model of the *Georgics* and the *Æneid*, and I am so much struck with this resemblance, that I should have attempted Virgil in blank verse, had I not been persuaded that no ancient author can with advantage be so rendered. Their religion, their warfare, their course of action and feeling are too remote from modern interest to allow it. We require every possible help and attraction of sound in our language to smooth the way for the admission of things so remote from our present concerns. My own notion of translation is, that it cannot be too literal, provided these faults be avoided: *baldness*, in which I include all that takes from dignity; and strangeness, or uncouthness, including harshness; and lastly, attempts to convey meanings, which, as they cannot be given but by languid circumlocutions, cannot in fact be said to be given at all. . . . I feel it, however, to be too probable that my translation is deficient in ornament, because I must unavoidably have lost many of Virgil's, and have never without reluctance attempted a compensation of my own."

The truth of this last self-criticism is very apparent from the fragments of the translation which were published in the *Philological Museum;* and Coleridge, to whom the whole manuscript was submitted, justly complains of finding "page after page without a single brilliant note;" and adds, "Finally, my conviction is that you undertake an impossibility, and that there is no medium between a pure version and one on the avowed principle of *compensation* in the widest sense, *i.e.*, manner, genius, total effect; I confine myself to *Virgil* when I say this." And it appears that Wordsworth himself came round to this view, for, reluctantly sending a specimen of his work to the *Philological Museum* in 1832, he says:

> "Having been displeased in modern translations with the additions of incongruous matter, I began to translate with a resolve to keep clear of that fault by adding nothing: but I became convinced that a spirited translation can scarcely be accomplished in the English language without admitting a principle of compensation."

There is a curious analogy between the experiences of Cowper and Wordsworth in the way of translation. Wordsworth's translation of Virgil was prompted by the same kind of reaction against the reckless laxity of Dryden as that which inspired Cowper against the distorting artificiality of Pope. In each case the new translator cared more for his author, and took a much higher view of a translator's duty, than his predecessor had done. But in each case the plain and accurate translation was a failure, while the loose and ornate one continued to be admired. We need not conclude from

this that the wilful inaccuracy of Pope or Dryden would be any longer excusable in such a work. But on the other hand, we may certainly feel that nothing is gained by rendering an ancient poet into verse at all unless that verse be of a quality to give a pleasure independent of the faithfulness of the translation which it conveys.

The translations and *Laodamia* are not the only indications of the influence which Virgil exercised over Wordsworth. Whether from mere similarity of feeling, or from more or less conscious recollection, there are frequent passages in the English which recall the Roman poet. Who can hear Wordsworth describe how a poet on the island in Grasmere

> "At noon
> Spreads out his limbs, while, yet unshorn, the sheep,
> Panting beneath the burthen of their wool,
> Lie round him, even as if they were a part
> Of his own household"—

and not think of the stately tenderness of Virgil's

> "Stant et oves circum; nostri nec pœnitet illas,"

and the flocks of Arcady that gather round in sympathy with the lovelorn Gallus' woe?

So, again, the well-known lines—

> "Not seldom, clad in radiant vest,
> Deceitfully goes forth the Morn
> Not seldom Evening in the west
> Sinks smilingly forsworn"—

are almost a translation of Palinurus' remonstrance with "the treachery of tranquil heaven." And when the poet wishes for any link which could bind him closer to the Highland maiden who has flitted across his path as a being of a different world from his own—

> "Thine elder Brother would I be,
> Thy Father, anything to thee!"—

we hear the echo of the sadder plaint—

> "Atque utinam e vobis unus"-

when the Roman statesman longs to be made one with the simple life of shepherd or husbandman, and to know their undistracted joy.

Still more impressive is the shock of surprise with which we read in Wordsworth's poem on Ossian the following lines:

> "Musæus, stationed with his lyre
> Supreme among the Elysian quire,
> Is, for the dwellers upon earth,
> Mute as a lark ere morning's birth,"

and perceive that he who wrote them has entered—where no commentator could conduct him—into the solemn pathos of Virgil's *Musæum ante omnis;* where the singer whose very existence upon earth has become a legend and a mythic name is seen keeping in

the underworld his old pre-eminence, and towering above the blessed dead.

This is a stage in Wordsworth's career on which his biographer is tempted unduly to linger. For we have reached the Indian summer of his genius; it can still shine at moments bright as ever, and with even a new majesty and calm; but we feel, nevertheless, that the melody is dying from his song; that he is hardening into self-repetition, into rhetoric, into sermonising common-place, and is rigid where he was once profound. The *Thanksgiving Ode* (1816) strikes death to the heart. The accustomed patriotic sentiments—the accustomed virtuous aspirations—these are still there; but the accent is like that of a ghost who calls to us in hollow-mimicry of a voice that once we loved.

And yet Wordsworth's poetic life was not to close without a great symbolical spectacle, a solemn farewell. Sunset among the Cumbrian hills, often of remarkable beauty, once or twice, perhaps, in a score of years, reaches a pitch of illusion and magnificence which indeed seems nothing less than the commingling of earth and heaven. Such a sight—seen from Rydal Mount in 1818—afforded once more the needed stimulus, and evoked that "*Evening Ode. composed on an evening of extraordinary splendour and beauty*," which is the last considerable production of Wordsworth's genius. In this ode we recognise the peculiar gift of reproducing with magical simplicity, as it were, the inmost virtue of natural phenomena.

> "No sound is uttered, but a deep
> And solemn harmony pervades
> The hollow vale from steep to steep,
> And penetrates the glades.
> Far distant images draw nigh,
> Called forth by wondrous potency
> Of beamy radiance, that imbues
> Whate'er it strikes, with gem-like hues!
> In vision exquisitely clear
> Herds range along the mountain side;
> And glistening antlers are descried,
> And gilded flocks appear."

Once more the poet brings home to us that sense of belonging at once to two worlds, which gives to human life so much of mysterious solemnity.

> "Wings at my shoulder seem to play;
> But, rooted here, I stand and gaze
> On those bright steps that heavenward raise
> Their practicable way."

And the poem ends—with a deep personal pathos—in an allusion, repeated from the *Ode on Immortality*, to the light which "lay about him in his infancy"—the light

"Full early lost, and fruitlessly deplored;
Which at this moment, on my waking sight
Appears to shine, by miracle restored!
My soul, though yet confined to earth,
Rejoices in a second birth;
—'Tis past, the visionary splendour fades
And night approaches with her shades."

For those to whom the mission of Wordsworth appears before all things as a religious one there is something solemn in the spectacle of the seer standing at the close of his own apocalypse, with the consciousness that the stiffening brain would never permit him to drink again that overflowing sense of glory and revelation—never, till he should drink it new in the kingdom of God. He lived, in fact, through another generation of men, but the vision came to him no more;

"Or if some vestige of those gleams
Survived, 'twas only in his dreams."

We look on a man's life for the most part as forming in itself a completed drama. We love to see the interest maintained to the close, the pathos deepened at the departing hour. To die on the same day is the prayer of lovers; to vanish at Trafalgar is the ideal of heroic souls. And yet—so wide and various are the issues of life—there is a solemnity as profound in a quite different lot; for if we are moving among eternal emotions we should have time to bear witness that they are eternal. Even Love left desolate may feel with a proud triumph that it could never have rooted itself so immutably amid the joys of a visible return as it can do through the constancies of bereavement, and the life-long memory which is a life-long hope. And Vision, Revelation, Ecstasy—it is not only while these are kindling our way that we should speak of them to men, but rather when they have passed from us and left us only their record in our souls, whose permanence confirms the fiery finger which wrote it long ago. For as the Greeks would end the first drama of a trilogy with a hush of concentration, and with declining notes of calm, so to us the narrowing receptivity and persistent steadfastness of age suggest not only decay but expectancy, and not death so much as sleep; or seem, as it were, the beginning of operations which are not measured by our hurrying time, nor tested by any achievement to be accomplished here.

CHAPTER X.

NATURAL RELIGION.

It will have been obvious from the preceding pages, as well as from the tone of other criticisms on Wordsworth, that his exponents are not content to treat his poems on nature simply as graceful descriptive pieces, but speak of him in terms usually reserved for the originators of some great religious movement. "The very image of Wordsworth," says De Quincey, for instance, "as I prefigured it to my own planet-struck eye, crushed my faculties as before Elijah or St. Paul." How was it that poems so simple in outward form that the reviewers of the day classed them with the *Song of Sixpence*, or at best with the *Babes in the Wood*, could affect a critic like De Quincey—I do not say with admiration, but with this exceptional sense of revelation and awe?

The explanation of this anomaly lies, as is well known, in something new and individual in the way in which Wordsworth regarded nature; something more or less discernible in most of his works, and redeeming even some of the slightest of them from insignificance, while conferring on the more serious and sustained pieces an importance of a different order from that which attaches to even the most brilliant productions of his contemporaries. To define with exactness, however, what was this new element imported by our poet into man's view of nature is far from easy, and requires some brief consideration of the attitude in this respect of his predecessors.

There is so much in the external world which is terrible or unfriendly to man, that the first impression made on him by Nature as a whole, even in temperate climates, is usually that of awfulness; his admiration being reserved for the fragments of her which he has utilised for his own purposes, or adorned with his own handiwork. When Homer tells us of a place

> "Where even a god might gaze, and stand apart,
> And feel a wondering rapture at the heart,"

it is of no prospect of sea or mountain that he is speaking, but of a garden where everything is planted in rows, and there is a never-ending succession of pears and figs. These gentler aspects of

nature will have their minor deities to represent them; but the men, of whatever race they be, whose minds are most absorbed in the problems of man's position and destiny will tend for the most part to some sterner and more overwhelming conception of the sum of things. "Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him?" is the cry of Hebrew piety as well as of modern science; and the "majestas cognita rerum"—the recognised majesty of the universe—teaches Lucretius only the indifference of gods and the misery of men.

But in a well-known passage, in which Lucretius is honoured as he deserves, we find, nevertheless, a different view hinted, with an impressiveness which it had hardly acquired till then. We find Virgil implying that scientific knowledge of Nature may not be the only way of arriving at the truth about her; that her loveliness is also a revelation, and that the soul which is in unison with her is justified by its own peace. This is the very substance of *The Poet's Epitaph* also; of the poem in which Wordsworth at the beginning of his career describes himself as he continued till its close—the poet who "murmurs near the running brooks a music sweeter than their own"—who scorns the man of science "who would peep and botanise upon his mother's grave."

"The outward shows of sky and earth,
Of hill and valley, he has viewed;
And impulses of deeper birth
Have come to him in solitude.

"In common things that round us lie
Some random truths he can impart—
The harvest of a quiet eye
That broods and sleeps on his own heart.

"But he is weak, both man and boy,
Hath been an idler in the land;
Contented if he might enjoy
The things which others understand."

Like much else in the literature of imperial Rome, the passage in the second *Georgic*, to which I have referred, is in its essence more modern than the Middle Ages. Mediæval Christianity involved a divorce from the nature around us, as well as from the nature within. With the rise of modern spirit delight in the external world returns; and from Chaucer downwards through the whole course of English poetry are scattered indications of a mood which draws from visible things an intuition of things not seen. When Withers, in words which Wordsworth has fondly quoted, says of his muse:

"By the murmur of a spring,
Or the least bough's rustelling;
By a daisy whose leaves spread,
Shut when Titan goes to bed;

Or a shady bush or tree—
She could more infuse in me
Than all Nature's beauties can
In some other wiser man"—

he felt already, as Wordsworth after him, that Nature is no mere collection of phenomena, but infuses into her least approaches some sense of her mysterious whole.

Passages like this, however, must not be too closely pressed. The mystic element in English literature has run for the most part into other channels; and when, after Pope's reign of artificiality and convention, attention was redirected to the phenomena of Nature by Collins, Beattie, Thomson, Crabbe, Cowper, Burns, and Scott, it was in a spirit of admiring observation rather than of an intimate worship. Sometimes, as for the most part in Thomson, we have mere picturesqueness—a reproduction of Nature for the mere pleasure of reproducing her—a kind of stock-taking of her habitual effects. Or sometimes, as in Burns, we have a glowing spirit which looks on Nature with a side glance, and uses her as an accessory to the expression of human love and woe. Cowper sometimes contemplated her as a whole, but only as affording a proof of the wisdom and goodness of a personal Creator.

To express what is characteristic in Wordsworth we must recur to a more generalised conception of the relations between the natural and the spiritual worlds. We must say with Plato—the lawgiver of all subsequent idealists—that the unknown realities around us, which the philosopher apprehends by the contemplation of abstract truth, become in various ways obscurely perceptible to men under the influence of "divine madness"—of an enthusiasm which is in fact inspiration. And further, giving, as he so often does, a half-fanciful expression to a substance of deep meaning, Plato distinguishes four kinds of this enthusiasm. There is the prophet's glow of revelation; and the prevailing prayer which averts the wrath of heaven; and that philosophy which enters, so to say, unawares into the poet through his art, and into the lover through his love. Each of these stimuli may so exalt the inward faculties as to make a man ἔνθεος καὶ ἔκφρων—"bereft of reason, but filled with divinity"—percipient of an intelligence other and larger than his own. To this list Wordsworth has made an important addition. He has shown by his example and writings that the contemplation of Nature may become a stimulus as inspiring as these; may enable us "to see into the life of things"—as far, perhaps, as beatific vision or prophetic rapture can attain. Assertions so impalpable as these must justify themselves by subjective evidence. He who claims to give a message must satisfy us that he has himself received it; and, inasmuch as transcendent things are in themselves inexpressible, he must convey to us in hints and figures the conviction which we need. Prayer may bring the spiritual world near to us; but when the eyes of the kneeling Dominic seem to say "*Io son venuto a questo*," their look must persuade us that the

life of worship has indeed attained the reward of vision. Art, too, may be inspired; but the artist, in whatever field he works, must have "such a mastery of his mystery" that the fabric of his imagination stands visible in its own light before our eyes—

> "Seeing it is built
> Of music; therefore never built at all,
> And therefore built for ever."

Love may open heaven; but when the lover would invite us "thither, where are the eyes of Beatrice," he must make us feel that his individual passion is indeed part and parcel of that love "which moves the sun and the other stars."

And so also with Wordsworth. Unless the words which describe the intense and sympathetic gaze with which he contemplates Nature convince us of the reality of "the light which never was on sea or land"—of the "Presence which disturbs him with the joy of elevated thoughts"—of the authentic vision of those hours

> "When the light of sense
> Goes out, but with a flash that has revealed
> The invisible world;"

unless his tone awakes a responsive conviction in ourselves, there is no argument by which he can prove to us that he is offering a new insight to mankind. Yet, on the other hand, it need not be unreasonable to see in his message something more than a mere individual fancy. It seems, at least, to be closely correlated with those other messages of which we have spoken—those other cases where some original element of our nature is capable of being regarded as an inlet of mystic truth. For in each of these complex aspects of religion we see, perhaps, the modification of a primeval instinct. There is a point of view from which Revelation seems to be but transfigured Sorcery, and Love transfigured Appetite, and Philosophy man's ordered Wonder, and Prayer his softening Fear. And similarly, in the natural religion of Wordsworth we may discern the modified outcome of other human impulses hardly less universal—of those instincts which led our forefathers to people earth and air with deities, or to vivify the whole universe with a single soul. In this view the achievement of Wordsworth was of a kind which most of the moral leaders of the race have in some way or other performed. It was that he turned a theology back again into a religion; that he revived in a higher and purer form those primitive elements of reverence for Nature's powers which had diffused themselves into speculation, or crystallised into mythology; that for a system of beliefs about Nature, which paganism had allowed to become grotesque—of rites which had become unmeaning—he substituted an admiration for Nature so constant, an understanding of her so subtle, a sympathy so profound, that they became a veritable worship. Such worship, I repeat, is not what

we commonly imply either by paganism or by pantheism. For in pagan countries, though the gods may have originally represented natural forces, yet the conception of them soon becomes anthropomorphic, and they are reverenced as transcendent *men;* and, on the other hand, pantheism is generally characterised by an indifference to things in the concrete, to Nature in detail; so that the Whole, or Universe, with which the Stoics (for instance) sought to be in harmony, was approached not by contemplating external objects, but rather by ignoring them.

Yet here I would be understood to speak only in the most general manner. So congruous in all ages are the aspirations and the hopes of men that it would be rash indeed to attempt to assign the moment when any spiritual truth rises for the first time on human consciousness. But thus much, I think, may be fairly said, that the maxims of Wordsworth's form of natural religion were uttered before Wordsworth only in the sense in which the maxims of Christianity were uttered before Christ. To compare small things with great—or, rather, to compare great things with things vastly greater—the essential spirit of the *Lines near Tintern Abbey* was for practical purposes as new to mankind as the essential spirit of the *Sermon on the Mount.* Not the isolated expression of moral ideas, but their fusion into a whole in one memorable personality, is that which connects them forever with a single name. Therefore it is that Wordsworth is venerated; because so many men—indifferent, it may be, to literary or poetical effects, as such—he has shown by the subtle intensity of his own emotion how the contemplation of Nature can be made a revealing agency, like Love or Prayer—an opening, if indeed there be any opening, into the transcendant world.

The prophet with such a message as this will, of course, appeal for the most part to the experience of exceptional moments—those moments when "we see into the life of things;" when the face of Nature sends to us "gleams like the flashing of a shield"—hours such as those of the Solitary, who, gazing on the lovely distant scene,

> "Would gaze till it became
> Far lovelier, and his heart could not sustain
> The beauty, still more beauteous."

But the idealist, of whatever school, is seldom content to base his appeal to us upon these scattered intuitions alone. There is a whole epoch of our existence whose memories, differing, indeed, immensely in vividness and importance in the minds of different men, are yet sufficiently common to all men to form a favourite basis for philosophical argument. "The child is father of the man;" and through the recollection and observation of early childhood we may hope to trace our ancestry—in heaven above or on the earth beneath— in its most significant manifestation.

It is to the workings of the mind of the child that the philosopher appeals who wishes to prove that knowledge is recollection, and

that our recognition of geometrical truths—so prompt as to appear instinctive—depends on our having been actually familiar with them in an earlier world. The Christian mystic invokes with equal confidence his own memories of a state which seemed as yet to know no sin:

> "Happy those early days, when I
> Shined in my angel infancy!
> Before I understood this place
> Appointed for my second race,
> Or taught my soul to fancy aught
> But a white, celestial thought;
> When yet I had not walked above
> A mile or two from my first Love,
> And, looking back at that short space,
> Could see a glimpse of His bright face;
> When on some gilded cloud or flower
> My gazing soul would dwell an hour,
> And in those weaker glories spy
> Some shadows of eternity;
> Before I taught my tongue to wound
> My conscience with a sinful sound,
> Or had the black art to dispense
> A several sin to every sense,
> But felt through all this fleshly dress
> Bright shoots of everlastingness."

And Wordsworth, whose recollections were exceptionally vivid, and whose introspection was exceptionally penetrating, has drawn from his own childish memories philosophical lessons which are hard to disentangle in a logical statement, but which will roughly admit of being classed under two heads. For, firstly, he has shown an unusual delicacy of analysis in eliciting the "firstborn affinities that fit our new existence to existing things"—in tracing the first impact of impressions which are destined to give the mind its earliest ply, or even, in unreflecting natures, to determine the permanent modes of thought. And, secondly, from the halo of pure and vivid emotions with which our childish years are surrounded, and the close connexion of this emotion with external nature, which it glorifies and transforms, he infers that the soul has enjoyed elsewhere an existence superior to that of earth, but an existence of which external nature retains for a time the power of reminding her.

The first of these lines of thought may be illustrated by a passage in the *Prelude*, in which the boy's mind is represented as passing through precisely the train of emotion which we may imagine to be at the root of the theology of many barbarous peoples. He is rowing at night alone on Esthwaite Lake, his eyes fixed upon a ridge of crags, above which nothing is visible:

> "I dipped my oars into the silent lake,
> And as I rose upon the stroke my boat

Went heaving through the water like a swan;
When, from behind that craggy steep till then
The horizon's bound, a huge peak, black and huge,
As if with voluntary power instinct
Upreared its head. I struck and struck again;
And, growing still in stature, the grim shape
Towered up between me and the stars, and still,
For so it seemed, with purpose of its own,
And measured motion like a living thing,
Strode after me. With trembling oars I turned,
And through the silent water stole my way
Back to the covert of the willow-tree;
There in her mooring-place I left my bark,
And through the meadows homeward went, in grave
And serious mood. But after I had seen
That spectacle, for many days, my brain
Worked with a dim and undetermined sense
Of unknown modes of being; o'er my thoughts
There hung a darkness—call it solitude,
Or blank desertion. No familiar shapes
Remained, no pleasant images of trees,
Of sea, or sky, no colours of green fields;
But huge and mighty forms, that do not live
Like living men, moved slowly thro' the mind
By day, and were a trouble to my dreams."

In the controversy as to the origin of the worship of inanimate objects, or of the powers of Nature, this passage might fairly be cited as an example of the manner in which those objects, or those powers, can impress the mind with that awe which is the foundation of savage creeds, while yet they are not identified with any human intelligence, such as the spirits of ancestors or the like, nor even supposed to operate according to any human analogy.

Up to this point Wordsworth's reminiscences may seem simply to illustrate the conclusions which science reaches by other roads. But he is not content with merely recording and analysing his childish impressions; he implies, or even asserts, that these "fancies from afar are brought"—that the child's view of the world reveals to him truths which the man with difficulty retains or recovers. This is not the usual teaching of science, yet it would be hard to assert that it is absolutely impossible. The child's instincts may well be supposed to partake in larger measure of the general instincts of the race, in smaller measure of the special instincts of his own country and century, than is the case with the man. Now the feelings and beliefs of each successive century will probably be, on the whole, superior to those of any previous century. But this is not universally true; the teaching of each generation does not thus sum up the results of the whole past. And thus the child, to whom in a certain sense the past of humanity is present—who is living through the whole life of the race in little, before he lives the life of his century in large—may possibly dimly apprehend something more of truth in certain directions than is visible to the adults around him.

But, thus qualified, the intuitions of infancy might seem scarcely worth insisting on. And Wordsworth, as is well known, has followed Plato in advancing for the child a much bolder claim. The child's soul, in this view, has existed before it entered the body—has existed in a world superior to ours, but connected, by the immanence of the same pervading Spirit, with the material universe before our eyes. The child begins by feeling this material world strange to him. But he sees in it, as it were, what he has been accustomed to see; he discerns in it its kinship with the spiritual world which he dimly remembers; it is to him "an unsubstantial fairy place"—a scene at once brighter and more unreal than it will appear in his eyes when he has become acclimatised to earth. And even when this freshness of insight has passed away, it occasionally happens that sights or sounds of unusual beauty or carrying deep associations—a rainbow, a cuckoo's cay, a sunset of extraordinary splendour—will renew for a while this sense of vision and nearness to the spiritual world—a sense which never loses its reality, though with advancing years its presence grows briefer and more rare.

Such then, in prosaic statement, is the most characteristic message of Wordsworth. And it is to be noted that though Wordsworth at times presents it as a coherent theory, yet it is not necessarily of the nature of a theory, nor need be accepted or rejected as a whole; but is rather an inlet of illumining emotion in which different minds can share in the measure of their capacities or their need. There are some to whom childhood brought no strange vision of brightness, but who can feel their communion with the Divinity in Nature growing with the growth of their souls. There are others who might be unwilling to acknowledge any spiritual or transcendent source for the elevating joy which the contemplation of Nature can give, but who feel, nevertheless, that to that joy Wordsworth has been their most effective guide. A striking illustration of this fact may be drawn from the passage in which John Stuart Mill, a philosopher of a very different school, has recorded the influence exercised over him by Wordsworth's poems, read in a season of dejection, when there seemed to be no real and substantive joy in life, nothing but the excitement of the struggle with the hardships and injustices of human fates.

"What made Wordsworth's poems a medicine for my state of mind," he says, in his Autobiography, "was that they expressed, not mere outward beauty, but states of feeling, and of thought coloured by feeling, under the excitement of beauty. They seemed to be the very culture of the feelings which I was in quest of. In them I seemed to draw from a source of inward joy, of sympathetic and imaginative pleasure, which could be shared in by all human beings, which had no connexion with struggle or imperfection, but would be made richer by every improvement in the physical or social condition of mankind. From them I seemed to learn what would be the perennial sources of happiness, when all the greater evils of life shall have been removed. And I felt myself at once better and happier as I came under their influence."

Words like these, proceeding from a mind so different from the poet's own, form perhaps as satisfactory a testimony to the value of his work as any writer can obtain: for they imply that Wordsworth has succeeded in giving his own impress to emotions which may become common to all; that he has produced a body of thought which is felt to be both distinctive and coherent, while yet it enlarges the reader's capacities instead of making demands upon his credence. Whether there be theories they shall pass; whether there be systems, they shall fail; the true epoch-maker in the history of the human soul is the man who educes from this bewildering universe a new and elevating joy.

I have alluded above to some of the passages, most of them familiar enough, in which Wordsworth's sense of the mystic relation between the world without us and the world within—the correspondence between the seen and the unseen—is expressed in its most general terms. But it is evident that such a conviction as this, if it contain any truth, cannot be barren of consequences on any level of thought. The communion with Nature which is capable of being at times sublimed to an incommunicable ecstasy must be capable also of explaining Nature to us so far as she can be explained; there must be *axiomata media* of natural religion; there must be something in the nature of poetic truths, standing midway between mystic intuition and delicate observation.

How rich Wordsworth is in these poetic truths—how illumining is the gaze which he turns on the commonest phenomena—how subtly and variously he shows us the soul's innate perceptions or inherited memories, as it were, co-operating with Nature and "half creating" the voice with which she speaks—all this can be learnt by attentive study alone. Only a few scattered samples can be given here; and I will begin with one on whose significance the poet has himself dwelt. This is the poem called *The Leech-Gatherer*, afterwards more formally named *Resolution and Independence*.

"I will explain to you," says Wordsworth, "in prose, my feelings in writing that poem. I describe myself as having been exalted to the highest pitch of delight by the joyousness and beauty of Nature: and then as depressed, even in the midst of those beautiful objects, to the lowest dejection and despair. A young poet in the midst of the happiness of Nature is described as overwhelmed by the thoughts of the miserable reverses which have befallen the happiest of all men, viz., poets. I think of this till I am so deeply impressed with it, that I consider the manner in which I am rescued from my dejection and despair almost as an interposition of Providence. A person reading the poem with feelings like mine will have been awed and controlled, expecting something spiritual or supernatural. What is brought forward? A lonely place, 'a pond, by which an old man *was*, far from all house or home;' not *stood*, nor *sat*, but *was*—the figure presented in the most naked simplicity possible. The feeling of spirituality or supernaturalness is again referred to as being strong in my mind in this passage. How

came he here? thought I, or what can he be doing? I then describe him, whether ill or well is not for me to judge with perfect confidence; but this I *can* confidently affirm, that though I believe God has given me a strong imagination, I cannot conceive a figure more impressive than that of an old man like this, the survivor of a wife and ten children, travelling alone among the mountains and all lonely places, carrying with him his own fortitude, and the necessities which an unjust state of society has laid upon him. You speak of his speech as tedious. Everything is tedious when one does not read with the feelings of the author. *The Thorn* is tedious to hundreds; and so is *The Idiot Boy* to hundreds. It is in the character of the old man to tell his story, which an impatient reader must feel tedious. But, good heavens! such a figure, in such a place; a pious, self-respecting, miserably infirm and pleased old man, telling such a tale!"

The naïve earnestness of this passage suggests to us how constantly recurrent in Wordsworth's mind were the two trains of ideas which form the substance of the poem; the interaction, namely (if so it may be termed), of the moods of Nature with the moods of the human mind; and the dignity and interest of man as man, depicted with no complex background of social or political life, but set amid the primary affections and sorrows, and the wild aspects of the external world.

Among the pictures which Wordsworth has left us of the influence of Nature on human character, *Peter Bell* may be taken as marking one end, and the poems on *Lucy* the other end of the scale. Peter Bell lives in the face of Nature untouched alike by her terror and her charm; Lucy's whole being is moulded by Nature's self; she is responsive to sun and shadow, to silence and to sound, and melts almost into an impersonation of a Cumbrian valley's peace. Between these two extremes how many are the possible shades of feeling! In *Ruth*, for instance, the point impressed upon us is that Nature's influence is only salutary so long as she is herself, so to say, in keeping with man; that when her operations reach that degree of habitual energy and splendour at which our love for her passes into fascination and our admiration into bewilderment, then the fierce and irregular stimulus consorts no longer with the growth of a temperate virtue:

> "The wind, the tempest roaring high,
> The tumult of a tropic sky,
> Might well be dangerous food
> For him, a youth to whom was given
> So much of earth, so much of heaven,
> And such impetuous blood."

And a contrasting touch recalls the healing power of those gentle and familiar presences which came to Ruth in her stormy madness with visitations of momentary calm:

"Yet sometimes milder hours she knew,
Nor wanted sun, nor rain, nor dew,
Nor pastimes of the May;
They all were with her in her cell;
And a wild brook with cheerful knell
Did o'er the pebbles play."

I will give one other instance of this subtle method of dealing with the contrasts in nature. It is from the poem entitled "*Lines left upon a Seat in a Yew-Tree which stands near the Lake of Esthwaite, on a desolate part of the Shore, commanding a beautiful Prospect.*" This seat was once the haunt of a lonely, a disappointed, an embittered man.

"Stranger! these gloomy boughs
Had charms for him; and here he loved to sit,
His only visitants a straggling sheep,
The stone-chat, or the glancing sand-piper;
And on these barren rocks, with fern and heath
And juniper and thistle sprinkled o'er,
Fixing his downcast eye, he many an hour
A morbid pleasure nourished, tracing here
An emblem of his own unfruitful life;
And, lifting up his head, he then would gaze
On the more distant scene—how lovely 'tis
Thou seest—and he would gaze till it became
Far lovelier, and his heart could not contain
The beauty, still more beauteous! Nor, that time,
When Nature had subdued him to herself,
Would he forget those beings, to whose minds,
Warm from the labours of benevolence,
The world, and human life, appeared a scene
Of kindred loveliness; then he would sigh
With mournful joy, to think that others felt
What he must never feel: and so, lost Man!
On visionary views would fancy feed
Till his eyes streamed with tears."

This is one of the passages which the lover of Wordsworth quotes, perhaps, with some apprehension; not knowing how far it carries into the hearts of others its affecting power; how vividly it calls up before them that mood of desolate loneliness when the whole vision of human love and joy hangs like a mirage in the air, and only when it seems irrecoverably distant seems also intolerably dear. But, however this particular passage may impress the reader, it is not hard to illustrate by abundant references the potent originality of Wordsworth's outlook on the external world.

There was indeed no aspect of nature, however often depicted, in which his seeing eye could not discern some unnoted quality; there was no mood to which nature gave birth in the mind of man from which his meditation could not disengage some element which threw light on our inner being. How often has the approach of

evening been described! and how mysterious is its solemnising power! Yet it was reserved for Wordsworth, in his sonnet, "Hail, Twilight, sovereign of one peaceful hour," to draw out a characteristic of that grey waning light which half explains to us its sombre and pervading charm. "Day's mutable distinctions" pass away; all in the landscape that suggests our own age or our own handiwork is gone; we look on the sight seen by our remote ancestors, and the visible present is generalised into an immeasurable past.

The sonnet on the Duddon beginning "What aspect bore the Man who roved or fled First of his tribe to this dark dell?" carries back the mind along the same track, with the added thought of Nature's permanent gentleness amid the "hideous usages" of primeval man—through all which the stream's voice was innocent, and its flow benign. "A weight of awe not easy to be borne" fell on the poet, also, as he looked on the earliest memorials which these remote ancestors have left us. The *Sonnet on a Stone-Circle* which opens with these words is conceived in a strain of emotion never more needed than now—when Abury itself owes its preservation to the munificence of a private individual—when stone-circle or round-tower, camp or dolmen, are destroyed to save a few shillings, and occupation-roads are mended with the immemorial altars of an unknown God. "Speak, Giant-mother! tell it to the Morn!"—how strongly does the heart re-echo the solemn invocation which calls on those abiding witnesses to speak once of what they knew long ago!

The mention of these ancient worships may lead us to ask in what manner Wordsworth was affected by the Nature-deities of Greece and Rome—impersonations which have preserved through so many ages so strange a charm. And space must be found here for the characteristic sonnet in which the baseness and materialism of modern life drives him back on whatsoever of illumination and reality lay in that young ideal.

"The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!
The Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;
The Winds that will be howling at all hours,
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;
For this, for everything we are out of tune;
It moves us not. Great God! I'd rather be
A pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea:
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn."

Wordsworth's own imagination idealised Nature in a different way. The sonnet "Brook! whose society the poet seeks" places him among the men whose Nature-deities have not yet become

anthropomorphic—men to whom "unknown modes of being" may seem more lovely as well as more awful than the life we know. He would not give to his idealised brook "human cheeks, channels for tears—no Naiad shouldst thou be"—

> "It seems the Eternal Soul is clothed in thee
> With purer robes than those of flesh and blood,
> And hath bestowed on thee a better good;
> Unwearied joy, and life without its cares."

And in the *Sonnet on Calais Beach* the sea is regarded in the same way, with a sympathy (if I may so say) which needs no help from an imaginary impersonation, but strikes back to a sense of kinship which seems antecedent to the origin of man.

> "It is a beauteous Evening, calm and free;
> The holy time is quiet as a Nun
> Breathless with adoration; the broad sun
> Is sinking down in its tranquillity;
> The gentleness of heaven is on the Sea:
> Listen! the mighty Being is awake,
> And doth with his eternal motion make
> A sound like thunder—everlastingly."

A comparison, made by Wordsworth himself, of his own method of observing Nature with Scott's expresses in less mystical language something of what I am endeavouring to say.

"He expatiated much to me one day," says Mr. Aubrey de Vere, "as we walked among the hills above Grasmere, on the mode in which Nature had been described by one of the most justly popular of England's modern poets—one for whom he preserved a high and affectionate respect. 'He took pains,' Wordsworth said; 'he went out with his pencil and note-book, and jotted down whatever struck him most—a river rippling over the sands, a ruined tower on a rock above it, a promontory, and a mountain-ash waving with its berries. He went home and wove the whole together into a poetical description.' After a pause, Wordsworth resumed, with a flashing eye and impassioned voice: 'But Nature does not permit an inventory to be made of her charms! He should have left his pencil and note-book at home, fixed his eye as he walked with a reverent attention on all that surrounded him, and taken all into a heart that could understand and enjoy. Then, after several days had passed by, he should have interrogated his memory as to the scene. He would have discovered that, while much of what he had admired was preserved to him, much was also most wisely obliterated; that which remained—the picture surviving in his mind—would have presented the ideal and essential truth of the scene, and done so in a large part by discarding much which, though in itself striking, was not characteristic. In every scene many of the most brilliant details are but accidental; a true eye for Nature does not note them, or at least does not dwell on them.'"

How many a phrase of Wordsworth's rises in the mind in illustration of this power! phrases which embody in a single picture,

or a single image—it may be the vivid wildness of the flowery coppice, of

> "Flaunting summer, when he throws
> His soul into the briar-rose"—

or the melancholy stillness of the declining year—

> "Where floats
> O'er twilight fields the autumnal gossamer;"

or, as in the words which to the sensitive Charles Lamb seemed too terrible for art, the irresponsive blankness of the universe—

> "The broad open eye of the solitary sky"—

beneath which mortal hearts must make what merriment they may.

Or take those typical stanzas in *Peter Bell*, which so long were accounted among Wordsworth's leading absurdities.

> "In vain through every changeful year
> Did Nature lead him as before;
> A primrose by the river's brim
> A yellow primrose was to him,
> And it was nothing more.
>
> "In vain, through water, earth, and air,
> The soul of happy sound was spread,
> When Peter, on some April morn,
> Beneath the broom or budding thorn,
> Made the warm earth his lazy bed.
>
> "At noon, when by the forest's edge
> He lay beneath the branches high,
> The soft blue sky did never melt
> Into his heart—he never felt
> The witchery of the soft blue sky!
>
> "On a fair prospect some have looked
> And felt, as I have heard them say,
> As if the moving time had been
> A thing as steadfast as the scene
> On which they gazed themselves away."

In all these passages, it will be observed, the emotion is educed from Nature rather than added to her; she is treated as a mystic text to be deciphered, rather than as a stimulus to roving imagination. This latter mood, indeed, Wordsworth feels occasionally, as in the sonnet where the woodland sights become to him "like a dream of the whole world;" but it is checked by the recurring sense that "it is our business to idealise the real, and not to realise the ideal." Absorbed in admiration of fantastic clouds of sunset, he feels for a moment ashamed to think that they are unremmemberable—

"They are of the sky,
And from our earthly memory fade away."

But soon he disclaims this regret, and reasserts the paramount interest of the things that we can grasp and love:

"Grove, isle, with every shape of sky-built dome,
Though clad in colours beautiful and pure,
Find in the heart of man no natural home:
The immortal Mind craves objects that endure:
These cleave to it; from these it cannot roam,
Nor they from it: their fellowship is secure."

From this temper of Wordsworth's mind, it follows that there will be many moods in which we shall not retain him as our companion. Moods which are rebellious, which beat at the bars of fate; moods of passion reckless in its vehemence, and assuming the primacy of all other emotions through the intensity of its delight or pain; moods of mere imaginative phantasy, when we would fain shape from the well-worn materials of our thought some fabric at once beautiful and new; from all such phases of our inward being Wordsworth stands aloof. His poem on the nightingale and the stock-dove illustrates with half-conscious allegory the contrast between himself and certain other poets.

"O Nightingale! thou surely art
A creature of a fiery heart;
These notes of thine—they pierce and pierce;
Tumultuous harmony and fierce!
Thou sing'st as if the God of wine
Had helped thee to a Valentine;
A song in mockery and despite
Of shades, and dews, and silent Night;
And steady bliss, and all the loves
Now sleeping in their peaceful groves.

"I heard a Stock-dove sing or say
His homely tale, this very day;
His voice was buried among trees,
Yet to be come at by the breeze:
He did not cease; but cooed—and cooed,
And somewhat pensively he wooed.
He sang of love with quiet blending,
Slow to begin, and never ending;
Of serious faith and inward glee;
That was the Song—the Song for me!"

"*His voice was buried among trees*," says Wordsworth; "a metaphor expressing the love of *seclusion* by which this bird is marked; and characterising its note as not partaking of the shrill and the piercing, and therefore more easily deadened by the intervening shade; yet a note so peculiar, and withal so pleasing, that the breeze, gifted with that love of the sound which the poet feels,

penetrates the shade in which it is entombed, and conveys it to the ear of the listener."

Wordsworth's poetry on the emotional side (as distinguished from its mystical or its patriotic aspects) could hardly be more exactly described than in the above sentence. For while there are few poems of his which could be read to a mixed audience with the certainty of producing an immediate impression; yet, on the other hand, all the best ones gain in an unusual degree by repeated study; and this is especially the case with those in which some touch of tenderness is enshrined in a scene of beauty, which it seems to interpret, while it is itself exalted by it. Such a poem is *Stepping Westward*, where the sense of sudden fellowship, and the quaint greeting beneath the glowing sky, seem to link man's momentary wanderings with the cosmic spectacles of heaven. Such are the lines where all the wild romance of Highland scenery, the forlornness of the solitary vales, pours itself through the lips of the maiden singing at her work, "as if her song could have no ending"—

> "Alone she cuts and binds the grain,
> And sings a melancholy strain;
> O listen! for the Vale profound
> Is overflowing with the sound."

Such—and with how subtle a difference!—is the *Fragment* in which a "Spirit of noonday" wears on his face the silent joy of Nature in her own recesses, undisturbed by beast, or bird, or man—

> "Nor ever was a cloudless sky
> So steady or so fair."

And such are the poems—*We are Seven*, *The Pet Lamb*,* *Louisa*, *The Two April Mornings*—in which the beauty of rustic children melts, as it were, into Nature herself, and the

> "Blooming girl whose hair was wet
> With points of morning dew"

becomes the impersonation of the season's early joy. We may apply, indeed, to all these girls Wordsworth's description of leverets playing on a lawn, and call them—

> "Separate creatures in their several gifts
> Abounding, but so fashioned that in all

* The *Pet Lamb* is probably the only poem of Wordsworth's which can be charged with having done moral injury, and that to a single individual alone. "Barbara Lewthwaite," says Wordsworth, in 1843, "was not, in fact, the child whom I had seen and overheard as engaged in the poem. I chose the name for reasons implied in the above" (*i. e.*, an account of her remarkable beauty), "and will here add a caution against the use of names of living persons. Within a few months after the publication of this poem I was much surprised, and more hurt, to find it in a child's school-book, which, having been compiled by Lindley Murray, had come into use at Grasmere School, where Barbara was a pupil. And, alas, I had the mortification of hearing that she was very vain of being thus distinguished; and in after life she used to say that she remembered the incident, and what I said to her upon the occasion."

That Nature prompts them to display, their looks,
Their starts of motion and their fits of rest,
An undistinguishable style appears
And character of gladness, as if Spring
Lodged in their innocent bosoms, and the spirit
Of the rejoicing Morning were their own."

My limits forbid me to dwell longer on these points. The passages which I have been citing have been for the most part selected as illustrating the novelty and subtlety of Wordsworth's view of nature. But it will now be sufficiently clear how continually a strain of human interest is interwoven with the delight derived from impersonal things.

"Long have I loved what I behold,
The night that calms, the day that cheers:
The common growth of mother earth
Suffices me—her tears, her mirth,
Her humblest mirth and tears."

The poet of the *Waggoner*—who, himself a habitual water-drinker, has so glowingly described the glorification which the prospect of nature receives in a half-intoxicated brain—may justly claim that he can enter into all genuine pleasures, even of an order which he declines for himself. With anything that is false or artificial he cannot sympathise, nor with such faults as baseness, cruelty, rancour, which seem contrary to human nature itself; but in dealing with faults of mere *weakness* he is far less strait-laced than many less virtuous men.

He had, in fact, a reverence for human beings as such, which enabled him to face even their frailties without alienation; and there was something in his own happy exemption from such falls which touched him into regarding men less fortunate rather with pity than disdain:

"Because the unstained, the clear, the crystalline,
Have ever in them something of benign."

His comment on Burns's *Tam o' Shanter* will perhaps surprise some readers who are accustomed to think of him only in his didactic attitude.

"It is the privilegeof poetic genius," he says, "to catch, under certain restrictions of which, perhaps, at the time of its being exerted it is but dimly conscious, a spirit of pleasure wherever it can be found, in the walks of nature, and in the business of men. The poet, trusting to primary instincts, luxuriates among the felicities of love and wine, and is enraptured while he describes the fairer aspects of war, nor does he shrink from the company of the passion of love, though immoderate—from convivial pleasures, though intemperate—nor from the presence of war, though savage, and recognised as the handmaid of desolation. Frequently and admirably has Burns given way to these impulses of nature, both with reference to himself and in describing the condition of others. Who, but

some impenetrable dunce or narrow-minded puritan in works of art, ever read without delight the picture which he has drawn of the convivial exultation of the rustic adventurer, Tam o' Shanter? The poet fears not to tell the reader in the outset that his hero was a desperate and sottish drunkard, whose excesses were as frequent as his opportunities. This reprobate sits down to his cups while the storm is roaring, and heaven and earth are in confusion; the night is driven on by song and tumultuous noise, laughter and jest thicken as the beverage improves upon the palate—conjugal fidelity archly bends to the service of general benevolence—selfishness is not absent, but wearing the mask of social cordiality; and while these various elements of humanity are blended into one proud and happy composition of elated spirits, the anger of the tempest without doors only heightens and sets off the enjoyment within. I pity him who cannot perceive that in all this, though there was no moral purpose, there is a moral effect.

> "'Kings may be blest, but Tam was glorious,
> O'er a' the *ills* of life victorious.'

What a lesson do these words convey of charitable indulgence for the vicious habits of the principal actor in the scene, and of those who resemble him! Men who to the rigidly virtuous are objects almost of loathing, and whom therefore they cannot serve! The poet, penetrating the unsightly and disgusting surfaces of things, has unveiled with exquisite skill the finer ties of imagination and feeling, that often bind these beings to practices productive of so much unhappiness to themselves, and to those whom it is their duty to cherish; and, as far as he puts the reader into possession of this intelligent sympathy, he qualifies him for exercising a salutary influence over the minds of those who are thus deplorably enslaved."

The reverence for man as man, the sympathy for him in his primary relations and his essential being, of which these comments on *Tam o' Shanter* form so remarkable an example, is a habit of thought too ingrained in all Wordsworth's works to call for specific illustration. The figures of *Michael*, of *Matthew*, of the *Brothers*, of the hero of the *Excursion*, and even of the *Idiot Boy*, suggest themselves at once in this connexion. But it should be noted in each case how free is the poet's view from any idealisation of the poorer classes as such, from the ascription of imaginary merits to an unknown populace which forms the staple of so much revolutionary eloquence. These poems, while they form the most convincing rebuke to the exclusive pride of the rich and great, are also a stern and strenuous incentive to the obscure and lowly. They are pictures of the poor man's life as it is—pictures as free as Crabbe's from the illusion of sentiment—but in which the delight of mere observation (which in Crabbe predominates) is subordinated to an intense sympathy with all such capacities of nobleness and tenderness as are called out by the stress and pressure of penury or woe. They form for the folk of northern England (as the works of Burns and Scott for the Scottish folk) a gallery of figures that are modelled, as it were, both from without and from within; by one with experience so personal as to keep every sentence vividly accurate, and yet with an insight which could draw from that simple

life lessons to itself unknown. We may almost venture to generalise our statement further, and to assert that no writer since Shakspeare has left us so true a picture of the British nation. In Milton, indeed, we have the characteristic English spirit at a whiter glow; but it is the spirit of the scholar only, or of the ruler, not of the peasant, the woman, or the child. Wordsworth gives us that spirit as it is diffused among shepherds and husbandmen—as it exists in obscurity and at peace. And they who know what makes the strength of nations need wish nothing better than that the temper which he saw and honoured among the Cumbrian dales should be the temper of all England, now and for ever.

Our discussion of Wordsworth's form of Natural Religion has led us back by no forced transition to the simple life which he described and shared. I return to the story of his later years—if that be called a story which derives no interest from incident or passion, and dwells only on the slow broodings of a meditative soul.

CHAPER XI.

ITALIAN TOUR.—ECCLESIASTICAL SONNETS.—POLITICAL VIEWS.—LAUREATESHIP.

WORDSWORTH was fond of travelling, and indulged this taste whenever he could afford it. Comparing himself and Southey, he says in 1843: "My lamented friend Southey used to say that, had he been a Papist, the course of life which in all probability would have been his was that of a Benedictine monk, in a convent furnished with an inexhaustible library. *Books* were, in fact, his passion; and *wandering*, I can with truth affirm, was mine; but this propensity in me was happily counteracted by inability from want of fortune to fulfil my wishes." We find him, however, frequently able to contrive a change of scene. His swift tour in 1790, his residence in France in 1791–2, his residence in Germany, 1798–9, have been already touched on. Then came a short visit to France in August, 1802, which produced the sonnets on Westminster Bridge and Calais Beach. The tour in Scotland which was so fertile in poetry took place in 1803. A second tour in Scotland, in 1814, produced the *Brownie's Cell* and a few other pieces. And in July, 1820, he set out with his wife and sister and two or three other friends for a tour through Switzerland and Italy.

This tour produced a good deal of poetry; and here and there are touches which recall the old inspiration. Such is the comparison of the clouds about the Engelberg to hovering angels; and such the description of the eclipse falling upon the population of statues which throng the pinnacles of Milan Cathedral. But for the most part the poems relating to this tour have an artificial look; the sentiments in the vale of Chamouni seem to have been laboriously summoned for the occasion; and the poet's admiration for the Italian maid and the Helvetian girl is a mere shadow of the old feeling for the Highland girl, to whom, in fact, he seems obliged to recur in order to give reality to his new emotion.

To conclude the subject of Wordsworth's travels, I will mention here that in 1823 he made a tour in Holland, and in 1824 in North Wales, where his sonnet to the torrent at the Devil's Bridge recalls the Swiss scenery seen in his youth with vigour and dignity. In 1828 he made another excursion in Belgium with Coleridge, and in 1829 he visited Ireland with his friend Mr. Marshall. Neither of these tours was productive. In 1831 he paid a visit with his

daughter to Sir Walter Scott at Abbotsford, before his departure to seek health in Italy. Scott received them cordially, and had strength to take them to the Yarrow. "Of that excursion," says Wordsworth, "the verses *Yarrow Revisited* are a memorial. On our return in the afternoon we had to cross the Tweed, directly opposite Abbotsford. A rich but sad light, of rather a purple than a golden hue, was spread over the Eildon hills at that moment; and, thinking it probable that it might be the last time Sir Walter would cross the stream (the Tweed), I was not a little moved, and expressed some of my feelings in the sonnet beginning, *A trouble not of clouds nor weeping rain.* At noon on Thursday we left Abbotsford, and on the morning of that day Sir Walter and I had a serious conversation, *tete-à-tete*, when he spoke with gratitude of the happy life which, upon the whole, he had led. He had written in my daughter's album, before he came into the breakfast-room that morning, a few stanzas addressed to her; and, while putting the book into her hand, in his own study, standing by his desk, he said to her, in my presence, 'I should not have done anything of this kind but for your father's sake; they are probably the last verses I shall ever write.' They show how much his mind was impaired; not by the strain of thought, but by the execution, some of the lines being imperfect, and one stanza wanting corresponding rhymes. One letter, the initial S, had been omitted in the spelling of his own name."

There was another tour in Scotland in 1833, which produced *Memorials* of little poetic value. And in 1837 he made a long tour in Italy with Mr. Crabbe Robinson. But the poems which record this tour indicate a mind scarcely any longer susceptible to any vivid stimulus except from accustomed objects and ideas. The *Musings near Aquapendente* are musings on Scott and Helvellyn; the *Pine Tree of Monte Mario* is interesting because Sir George Beaumont has saved it from destruction; the *Cuckoo at Laverna* brings all childhood back into his heart. "I remember perfectly well," says Crabbe Robinson, "that I heard the cuckoo at Laverna twice before he heard it; and that it absolutely fretted him that my ear was first favoured; and that he exclaimed with delight, 'I hear it! I hear it!'" This was his last foreign tour; nor, indeed, are these tours very noticeable except as showing that he was not blindly wedded to his own lake scenery; that his admiration could face comparisons, and keep the same vividness when he was fresh from other orders of beauty.

The productions of these later years took for the most part a didactic rather than a descriptive form. In the volume entitled *Poems chiefly of Early and Later Years*, published in 1842, were many hortatory or ecclesiastical pieces of inferior merit, and among them various additions to the *Ecclesiastical Sketches*, a series of sonnets begun in 1821, but which he continued to enlarge, spending on them much of the energies of his later years. And although it is only in a few instances—as in the description of King's College, Cambridge—that these sonnets possess force or charm

enough to rank them high as poetry, yet they assume a certain value when we consider not so much their own adequacy as the greater inadequacy of all rival attempts in the same direction.

The Episcopalian Churchman, in this country or in the United States, will certainly nowhere find presented to him in poetical form so dignified and comprehensive a record of the struggles and the glories, of the vicissitudes and the edification, of the great body to which he belongs. Next to the Anglican liturgy, though next at an immense interval, these sonnets may take rank as the authentic exposition of her historic being—an exposition delivered with something of her own unadorned dignity, and in her moderate and tranquil tone.

I would not, however, seem to claim too much. The religion which these later poems of Wordsworth's embody is rather the stately tradition of a great Church than the pangs and aspirations of a holy soul. There is little in them, whether for good or evil, of the stuff of which a Paul, a Francis, a Dominic are made. That fervent emotion—akin to the passion of love rather than to intellectual or moral conviction—finds voice through singers of a very different tone. It is fed by an inward anguish and felicity which, to those who have not felt them, seem as causeless as a lover's moods; by wrestlings not with flesh and blood; by nights of despairing self-abasement; by ecstasies of an incommunicable peace. How great the gulf between Wordsworth and George Herbert!—Herbert "offering at heaven, growing and groaning thither"—and Wordsworth, for whom the gentle regret of the lines—

> "Me this unchartered freedom tires,
> I feel the weight of chance desires"—

forms his most characteristic expression of the self-judgment of the solitary soul.

Wordsworth accomplished one reconciliation of great importance to mankind. He showed, as plainly in his way as Socrates had shown it long ago, with what readiness a profoundly original conception of the scheme of things will shape itself into the mould of an established and venerable faith. He united the religion of the philosopher with the religion of the churchman; one rarer thing he could not do: he could not unite the religion of the philosopher with the religion of the saint. It is, indeed, evident that the most inspiring feeling which breathes through Wordsworth's ecclesiastical pieces is not of a doctrinal, not even of a spiritual kind. The ecclesiastical as well as the political sentiments of his later years are prompted mainly by the admiring love with which he regarded the structure of English society—seen as that society was by him in its simplest and most poetic aspect. This concrete attachment to the scenes about him had always formed an important element in his character. Ideal politics, whether in Church or State, had never occupied his mind, which sought rather to find its informing principles embodied in the England of his own day. The sonnet

On a Parsonage in Oxfordshire well illustrates the loving minuteness with which he draws out the beauty and fitness of the established scheme of things—the power of English country life to satisfy so many moods of feeling.

The country-seat of the English squire or nobleman has become—may we not say?—one of the world's chosen types of a happy and a stately home. And Wordsworth, especially in his poems which deal with Coleorton, has shown how deeply he felt the sway of such a home's hereditary majesty, its secure and tranquillising charm. Yet there are moods when the heart which deeply feels the inequality of human lots turns towards a humbler idea. There are moments when the broad park, the halls and towers seem no longer the fitting frame of human greatness, but rather an insolating solitude, and unfeeling triumph over the poor.

In such a mood of mind it will not always satisfy us to dwell, as Wordsworth has so often done, on the virtue and happiness that gather round a cottage hearth—which we must, after all, judge by a somewhat less exacting standard. We turn rather to the "refined rusticity" of an English Parsonage home—

> "Where holy ground begins, unhallowed ends,
> Is marked by no distinguishable line;
> The turf unites, the pathways intertwine"—

and the clergyman's abode has but so much of dignity as befits the minister of the Church which is the hamlet's centre; enough to suggest the old Athenian boast of beauty without extravagance, and study without effeminacy; enough to show that dwellings where not this life but another is the prevailing thought and care, yet need not lack the graces of culture nor the loves of home.

The sonnet on *Seathwaite Chapel*, and the life of Robert Walker, the incumbent of Seathwaite, which is given at length in notes to the sonnets on the Duddon, afford a still more characteristic instance of the clerical ideal towards which Wordsworth naturally turned. In Robert Walker he had a Cumbrian statesman turned into a practical saint; and he describes him with a gusto in which his laboured sonnets on *Laud* or on *Dissensions* are wholly deficient.

It was in social and political matters that the consequences of this idealising view of the facts around him in Cumberland were most apparent. Take education, for example. Wordsworth, as has been already stated, was one of the earliest and most impressive assertors of the national duty of teaching every English child to read. He insists on this with a prosaic earnestness which places several pages of the *Excursion* among what may be called the standing bugbears which his poems offer to the inexperienced reader. And yet as soon as, through the exertions of Bell and Lancaster, there seems to be some chance of really educating the poor, Dr. Bell, whom Coleridge fondly imagines as surrounded in heaven by multitudes of grateful angels, is to Wordsworth a name

of horror. The mistresses trained on his system are called "Dr Bell's sour-looking teachers in petticoats." And the instruction received in these new-fangled schools is compared to "the training that fits a boxer for victory in the ring." The reason of this apparent inconsistency is not far to seek. Wordsworth's eyes were fixed on the village life around him. Observation of that life impressed on him the imperative necessity of instruction in reading. But it was from a moral rather than an intellectual point of view that he regarded it as needful, and, this opening into the world of ideas once secured, he held that the cultivation of the home affections and home duties was all that was needed beyond. And thus the Westmoreland dame, "in her summer seat in the garden, and in winter by the fireside," was elevated into the unexpected position of the ideal instructress of youth.

Conservatism of this kind could provoke nothing but a sympathetic smile. The case was different when the same conservative —even retrogade—tendency showed itself on subjects on which party-feeling ran high. A great part of the meditative energy of Wordsworth's later years was absorbed by questions towards whose solution he contributed no new element, and which filled him with disproportionate fears. And some injustice has been done to his memory by those who have not fully realised the predisposing causes which were at work—the timidity of age, and the deep-rooted attachment to the England which he knew.

I speak of age, perhaps, somewhat prematurely, as the poet's gradually growing conservatism culminated in his opposition to the Catholic Relief Bill before he was sixty years old. But there is nothing to wonder at in the fact that the mind of a man of brooding and solitary habits should show traces of advancing age earlier than is the case with statesmen or men of the world, who are obliged to keep themselves constantly alive to the ideas of the generation that is rising around them. A deadness to new impressions, an unwillingness to make intellectual efforts in fresh directions, a tendency to travel the same mental pathways over and over again, and to wear the ruts of prejudice deeper at every step; such traces of age as these undoubtedly manifested themselves in the way in which the poet confronted the great series of changes—Catholic Emancipation, Reform Bill, New Poor Law—on which England entered about the year 1829. "My sixty-second year," Wordsworth writes, in 1832, "will soon be completed; and though I have been favoured thus far in health and strength beyond most men of my age, yet I feel its effects upon my spirits; they sink under a pressure of apprehension to which, at an earlier period of my life, they would probably have been superior." To this it must be added that the increasing weakness of the poet's eyes seriously limited his means of information. He had never read much contemporary literature, and he read less than ever now. He had no fresh or comprehensive knowledge of the general condition of the country, and he really believed in the prognostication which was uttered by many also who did *not* believe in it, that with the Re-

form Bill the England which he knew and loved would practically disappear. But there was nothing in him of the angry polemic, nothing of the calumnious partisan. One of the houses where Mr. Wordsworth was most intimate and most welcome was that of a reforming member of Parliament, who was also a manufacturer, thus belonging to the two classes for which the poet had the greatest abhorrence. But the intimacy was never for a moment shaken, and, indeed, in that house Mr. Wordsworth expounded the ruinous tendency of Reform and manufactures with even unusual copiousness, on account of the admiring affection with which he felt himself surrounded. The tone in which he spoke was never such as could give pain or excite antagonism; and—if I may be pardoned for descending to a detail which well illustrates my position—the only rejoinder which these diatribes provoked was that the poet on his arrival was sometimes decoyed into uttering them to the younger members of the family, whose time was of less value, so as to set his mind free to return to those topics of more permanent interest where his conversation kept to the last all that tenderness, nobility, wisdom, which in that family, as in many others familiar with the celebrated persons of that day, won for him a regard and a reverence such as was accorded to no other man.

To those. indeed, who realised how deeply he felt these changes —how profoundly his notion of national happiness was bound up with a lovely and vanishing ideal—the prominent reflection was that the hopes and principles which maintained through all an underlying hope and trust in the future must have been potent indeed. It was no easy optimism which promoted the lines written in 1837—one of his latest utterances—in which he speaks to himself with strong self-judgment and resolute hope. On reading them one shrinks from dwelling longer upon an old man's weakness and a brave man's fears.

"If this great world of joy and pain
Revolve in one sure track;
If Freedom, set, revive again,
And Virtue, flown, come back—

"Woe to the purblind crew who fill
The heart with each day's care,
Nor learn, from past and future, skill
To bear and to forbear."

The poet had also during these years more of private sorrow than his tranquil life had for a long time experienced. In 1832 his sister had a most serious illness, which kept her for many months in a state of great prostration, and left her, when the physical symptoms abated, with her intellect painfully impaired, and her bright nature permanently overclouded. Coleridge, too, was nearing his end. "He and my beloved sister," writes Wordsworth, in 1832, "are the two beings to whom my intellect is most indebted, and they are now proceeding, as it were, *pari passu*, along the path

of sickness, I will not say towards the grave, but I trust towards a blessed immortality."

In July, 1834, "every mortal power of Coleridge was frozen at its marvellous source." And although the early intimacy had scarcely been maintained—though the "comfortless and hidden well" had, for a time at least, replaced the "living murmuring fount of love" which used to spring beside Wordsworth's door—yet the loss was one which the surviving poet deeply felt. Coleridge was the only contemporary man of letters with whom Wordsworth's connexion had been really close: and when Wordsworth is spoken of as one of a group of poets exemplifying in various ways the influence of the Revolution, it is not always remembered how very little he had to do with the other famous men of his time. Scott and Southey were valued friends, but he thought little of Scott's poetry, and less of Southey's. Byron and Shelley he seems scarcely to have read; and there is nothing to show that he had ever heard of Keats. But to Coleridge his mind constantly reverted; he called him "the most wonderful man he had ever known," and he kept him as the ideal auditor of his own poems, long after Coleridge had listened to the *Prelude*—

> "A song divine of high and passionate thoughts
> To their own music chanted."

In 1836, moreover, died one for whom Coleridge, as well as Wordsworth, had felt a very high respect and regard—Sarah Hutchinson, Mrs. Wordsworth's sister, and long the inmate of Wordsworth's household. This most valued friend had been another instance of the singular good fortune which attended Wordsworth in his domestic connexions; and when she was laid in Grasmere churchyard, the stone above her tomb expressed the wish of the poet and his wife that, even as her remains were laid beside their dead children's, so their own bodies also might be laid by hers.

And now, while the inner circle of friends and relations began to pass away, the outer circle of admirers was rapidly spreading. Between the years 1830 and 1840 Wordsworth passed from the apostle of a clique into the most illustrious man of letters in England. The rapidity of this change was not due to any remarkable accident, nor to the appearance of any new work of genius. It was merely an extreme instance of what must always occur where an author, running counter to the fashion of his age, has to create his own public in defiance of the established critical powers. The disciples whom he draws round him are for the most part young; the established authorities are for the most part old; so that by the time that the original poet is about sixty years old, most of his admirers will be about forty, and most of his critics will be dead. His admirers now become his accredited critics; his works are widely introduced to the public; and if they are really good his reputation is secure. In Wordsworth's case the detractors had been unusually persistent, and the reaction, when it came, was there-

fore unusually violent; it was even somewhat factitious in its extent; and the poems were forced by enthusiasts upon a public which was only half ripe for them. After the poet's death a temporary counter-reaction succeeded, and his fame is only now finding its permanent level.

Among the indications of growing popularity was the publication of an American edition of Wordsworth's poems in 1837, by Professor Reed, of Philadelphia, with whom the poet interchanged many letters of interest. "The acknowledgments," he says, in one of these, "which I receive from the vast continent of America are among the most grateful that reach me. What a vast field is there open to the English mind, acting through our noble language! Let us hope that our authors of true genius will not be unconscious of that thought, or inattentve to the duty which it imposes upon them, of doing their utmost to instruct, to purify, and to elevate their readers."

But of all the manifestations of the growing honour in which Wordsworth was held, none was more marked or welcome than the honorary degree of D.C.L. conferred on him by the University of Oxford in the summer of 1839. Keble, as Professor of Poetry, introduced him in words of admiring reverence, and the enthusiasm of the audience was such as had never been evoked in that place before, "except upon the occasions of the visits of the Duke of Wellington." The collocation was an interesting one. The special claim advanced for Wordsworth by Keble in his Latin oration was "that he had shed a celestial light upon the affections, the occupations, the piety of the poor." And to many men besides the author of the *Christian Year* it seemed that this striking scene was, as it were, another visible triumph of the temper of mind which is of the essence of Christianity; a recognition that one spirit more had become as a little child, and had entered into the kingdom of heaven.

In October, 1842, another token of public respect was bestowed on him in the shape of an annuity of 300*l.* a year from the Civil List for distinguished literary merit. "I need scarcely add," says Sir Robert Peel, in making the offer, "that the acceptance by you of this mark of favour from the Crown, considering the grounds on which it is proposed, will impose no restraint upon your perfect independence, and involve no obligation of a personal nature." In March, 1843, came the death of Southey, and in a few days Wordsworth received a letter from Earl De la Warr, the Lord Chamberlain, offering him, in the most courteous terms, the office of Poet Laureate, which, however, he respectfully declined as imposing duties "which, far advanced in life as I am, I cannot venture to undertake."

This letter brought a reply from the Lord Chamberlain, pressing the office on him again, and a letter from Sir Robert Peel which gave dignified expression to the national feeling in the matter. "The offer," he says, "was made to you by the Lord Chamberlain, with my entire concurrence, not for the purpose of imposing on you

any onerous or disagreeable duties, but in order to pay you that tribute of respect which is justly due to the first of living poets. The Queen entirely approved of the nomination, and there is one unanimous feeling on the part of all who have heard of the proposal (and it is pretty generally known) that there could not be a question about the selection. Do not be deterred by the fear of any obligations which the appointment may be supposed to imply. I will undertake that you shall have nothing *required* from you. But as the Queen can select for this honourable appointment no one whose claims for respect and honour, on account of eminence as a poet, can be placed in competition with yours, I trust you will not longer hesitate to accept it."

This letter overcame the aged poet's scruples; and he filled with silent dignity the post of Laureate till, after seven years' space, a worthy successor received

> "This laurel greener from the brows
> Of him that uttered nothing base."

CHAPTER XII.

LETTERS ON THE KENDAL AND WINDERMERE RAILWAY.—CONCLUSION.

WORDSWORTH'S appointment to the Laureateship was significant in more ways than one. He was so much besides a poet, that his appointment implied something of a national recognition, not only of his past poetical achievements, but of the substantial truth of that body of principles which through many years of neglect and ridicule he had consistently supported. There was, therefore, nothing incongruous in the fact that the only composition of any importance which Wordsworth produced after he became Laureate was in prose—his two letters on the projected Kendal and Windermere railway, 1844. No topic, in fact, could have arisen on which the veteran poet could more fitly speak with whatever authority his official spokesmanship of the nation's higher life could give, for it was a topic with every aspect of which he was familiar; and so far as the extension of railways through the Lake country was defended on grounds of popular benefit (and not merely of commercial advantage) no one, certainly, had shown himself more capable of estimating at their full value such benefits as were here proposed.

The results which follow on a large incursion of visitors into the Lake country may be considered under two heads, as affecting the residents, or as affecting the visitors themselves. And first as to the residents. Of the wealthier class of these I say nothing, as it will perhaps be thought that their inconvenience is outweighed by the possible profits which the railway may bring to speculators or contractors. But the effect produced on the poorer residents—on the peasantry—is a serious matter, and the danger which was distantly foreseen by Wordsworth has since his day assumed grave proportions. And lest the poet's estimate of the simple virtue which is thus jeopardised should be suspected of partiality, it may be allowable to corroborate it by the testimony of an eminent man not a native of the district, though a settler therein in later life, and whose writings, perhaps, have done more than any man's since Wordsworth to increase the sum of human enjoyment derived both from Art and from Nature.

"The Border peasantry of Scotland and England," says Mr. Ruskin,* "painted with absolute fidelity by Scott and Wordsworth

* *A Protest against the Extension of Railways in the Lake District.*—Simpkin, Marshall and Co., 1876.

(for leading types out of this exhaustless portraiture, I may name Dandie Dinmont, and Michael), are hitherto a scarcely injured race; whose strength and virtue yet survive to represent the body and soul of England, before her days of mechanical decrepitude and commercial dishonour. There are men working in my own fields who might have fought with Henry the Fifth at Agincourt, without being discerned from among his knights; I can take my tradesmen's word for a thousand pounds; my garden gate opens on the latch to the public road, by day and night, without fear of any foot entering but my own; and my girl-guests may wander by road or moorland, or through every bosky dell of this wild wood, free as the heather-bees or squirrels. What effect on the character of such a population will be produced by the influx of that of the suburbs of our manufacturing towns there is evidence enough, if the reader cares to ascertain the facts, in every newspaper on his morning table."

There remains the question of how the greatest benefit is to be secured to visitors to the country, quite apart from the welfare of its more permanent inhabitants. At first sight this question seems to present a problem of a well-known order—to find the point of maximum pleasure to mankind in a case where the intensity of the pleasure varies inversely as its extension—where each fresh person who shares it diminishes *pro tanto* the pleasure of the rest. But, as Wordsworth has pointed out, this is not in reality the question here. To the great mass of cheap excursionists the characteristic scenery of the Lakes is in itself hardly a pleasure at all. The pleasure, indeed, which they derive from contact with Nature is great and important, but it is one which could be offered to them, not only as well but much better, near their own homes.

"It is benignly ordained that green fields, clear blue skies, running streams of pure water, rich groves and woods, orchards, and all the ordinary varieties of rural nature should find an easy way to the affections of all men. But a taste beyond this, however desirable it may be that every one should possess it, is not to be implanted at once; it must be gradually developed both in nations and individuals. Rocks and mountains, torrents and wide-spread waters, and all those features of nature which go to the composition of such scenes as this part of England is distinguished for, cannot, in their finer relations to the human mind, be comprehended, or even very imperfectly conceived, without processes of culture or opportunities of observation in some degree habitual. In the eye of thousands and tens of thousands, a rich meadow, with fat cattle grazing upon it, or the sight of what they would call a heavy crop of corn, is worth all that the Alps and Pyrenees in their utmost grandeur and beauty could show to them; and it is noticeable what trifling conventional prepossessions will, in common minds, not only preclude pleasure from the sight of natural beauty, but will even turn it into an object of disgust. In the midst of a small pleasure-ground immediately below my house rises a detached rock, equally remarkable for the beauty of its form, the ancient oaks that grow out of it, and the flowers and shrubs which adorn it. 'What a nice place would this be,' said a Manchester tradesman, pointing to the rock, 'if that ugly lump were but out of the way.' Men as little advanced in

the pleasure which such objects give to others are so far from being rare that they may be said fairly to represent a large majority of mankind. This is the fact, and none but the deceiver and the willingly deceived can be offended by its being stated."

And, since this is so, the true means of raising the taste of the masses consists, as Wordsworth proceeds to point out, in giving them—not a few hurried glimpses of what is above their comprehension, but permanent opportunities of learning at leisure the first great lessons which Nature has to teach. Since he wrote thus our towns have spread their blackness wider still, and the provision of parks for the recreation of our urban population has become a pressing national need. And here, again, the very word *recreation* suggests another unfitness in the Lake country for these purposes. Solitude is as characteristic of that region as beauty, and what the mass of mankind need for their refreshment—most naturally and justly—is not solitude but society.

> "The silence that is in the starry sky,
> The sleep that is among the lonely hills,"

is to them merely a drawback, to be overcome by moving about in large masses, and by congregating in chosen resorts with vehement hilarity. It would be most unreasonable to wish to curtail the social expansion of men whose lives are for the most part passed in a monotonous round of toil. But is it kinder and wiser—from any point of view but the railway shareholder's—to allure them into excursion trains by the prestige of a scenery which is to them (as it was to all classes a century or two ago) at best indifferent, or to provide them near at hand with their needed space for rest and play, not separated from their homes by hours of clamour and crowding, nor broken up by barren precipices, nor drenched with sweeping storm?

Unquestionably it is the masses whom we have first to consider. Sooner than that the great mass of the dwellers in towns should be debarred from the influences of Nature—sooner than that they should continue for another century to be debarred as now they are—it might be better that Cumbrian statesmen and shepherds should be turned into innkeepers and touts, and that every poet, artist, dreamer in England should be driven to seek his solitude at the North Pole. But it is the mere futility of sentiment to pretend that there need be any real collision of interests here. There is space enough in England yet for all to enjoy in their several manners, if those who have the power would leave some unpolluted rivers, and some unblighted fields, for the health and happiness of the factory-hand, whose toil is for their fortunes, and whose degradation is their shame.

Wordsworth, while indicating, with some such reasoning as this, the true method of promoting the education of the mass of men in natural joys, was assuredly not likely to forget that in every class, even the poorest, are found exceptional spirits which some inbred

power has attuned already to the stillness and glory of the hills. In what way the interests of such men may best be consulted, he has discussed in the following passage:

> "'O Nature, a' thy shows an' forms
> To feeling pensive hearts hae charms.

So exclaimed the Ayrshire ploughman, speaking of ordinary rural nature under the varying influences of the seasons; and the sentiment has found an echo in the bosoms of thousands in as humble a condition as he himself was when he gave vent to it. But then they *were* feeling, pensive hearts—men who would be among the first to lament the facility with which they had approached this region, by a sacrifice of so much of its quiet and beauty, as, from the intrusion of a railway, would be inseparable. What can, in truth, be more absurd than that either rich or poor should be spared the trouble of travelling by the high roads over so short a space, according to their respective means, if the unavoidable consequence must be a great disturbance of the retirement, and, in many places, a destruction of the beauty, of the country which the parties are come in search of? Would not this be pretty much like the child's cutting up his drum to learn where the sound came from?"

The truth of these words has become more conspicuous since Wordsworth's day. The Lake country is now both engirdled and intersected with railways. The point to which even the poorest of genuine lovers of the mountains could desire that his facilities of cheap locomotion should be carried has not only reached but far overpassed. If he is not content to dismount from his railway carriage at Coniston, or Seascale, or Bowness—at Penrith, or Troutbeck, or Keswick—and to move at eight miles an hour in a coach, or at four miles an hour on foot, while he studies that small intervening tract of country, of which every mile is a separate gem—when, we may ask, *is* he to dismount? what *is* he to study? Or is nothing to be expected from nature but a series of dissolving views?

It is impossible to feel sanguine as to the future of this irreplaceable national possession. A real delight in scenery—apart from the excitements of sport or mountaineering, for which Scotland and Switzerland are better suited than Cumberland—is still too rare a thing among the wealthier as among the poorer classes to be able to compete with such a power as the Railway Interest. And it is little likely now that the Government of England should act with regard to this district as the Government of the United States has acted with regard to the Yosemite and Yellowstone valleys, and guard as a national possession the beauty which will become rarer and more precious with every generation of men. But it is in any case desirable that Wordsworth's unanswered train of reasoning on the subject should be kept in view—that it should be clearly understood that the one argument for making more railways

through the Lakes is that they may possibly pay; while it is certain that each railway extension is injurious to the peasantry of the district, and to all visitors who really care for its scenery, while conferring no benefit on the crowds who are dragged many miles to what they do not enjoy, instead of having what they really want secured to them, as it ought to be, at their own doors.

It is probable that all this will continue to be said in vain. Railways, and mines, and waterworks will have their way, till injury has become destruction. The natural sanctuary of England, the nurse of simple and noble natures, "the last region which Astræa touches with flying feet," will be sacrificed—it is scarcely possible to doubt it—to the greed of gain. We must seek our consolation in the thought that no outrage on nature is mortal; that the ever-springing affections of men create for themselves continually some fresh abode, and inspire some new landscape with a consecrating history, and, as it were, with a silent soul. Yet it will be long ere round some other lakes, upon some other hill, shall cluster memories as pure and high as those which hover still around Rydal and Grasmere, and on Helvellyn's windy summit, "and by Glenridding Screes and low Glencoign."

With this last word of protest and warning—uttered, as it may seem to the reader, with unexpected force and conviction from out of the tranquillity of a serene old age—Wordsworth's mission is concluded. The prophecy of his boyhood is fulfilled, and the "dear native regions" whence his dawning genius rose have been gilded by the last ray of its declining fire. There remains but the domestic chronicle of a few more years of mingled sadness and peace. And I will first cite a characteristic passage from a letter to his American correspondent, Mr. Reed, describing his presentation as Laureate to the Queen:

"The reception given me by the Queen at her ball was most gracious. Mrs. Everett, the wife of your Minister, among many others, was a witness to it, without knowing who I was. It moved her to the shedding of tears. This effect was in part produced, I suppose, by American habits of feeling, as pertaining to a republican government. To see a gray-haired man of seventy-five years of age kneeling down in a large assembly to kiss the hand of a young woman is a sight for which institutions essentially democratic do not prepare a spectator of either sex, and must naturally place the opinions upon which a republic is founded, and the sentiments which support it, in strong contrast with a government based and upheld as ours is."

In the same letter the poet introduces an ominous allusion to the state of his daughter's health. Dora, his only daughter who survived childhood, was the darling of Wordsworth s age. In her wayward gaiety and bright intelligence there was much to remind him of his sister's youth; and his clinging nature wound itself round this new Dora as tenderly as it had ever done round her who was now only the object of loving compassion and care. In 1841 Dora Wordsworth married Mr. Quillinan, an ex-officer of the

Guards, and a man of great literary taste and some original power. In 1821 he had settled for a time in the vale of Rydal, mainly for the sake of Wordsworth's society; and ever since then he had been an intimate and valued friend. He had been married before, but his wife died in 1822, leaving him two daughters, one of whom was named from the murmuring Rotha, and was god-child of the poet. Shortly after marriage, Dora Quillinan's health began to fail. In 1845 the Quillinans went to Oporto in search of health, and returned in 1846, in the trust that it was regained. But in July, 1847, Dora Quillinan died at Rydal, and left her father to mourn for his few remaining years his "immeasurable loss."

The depth and duration of Wordsworth's grief, in such bereavements as fell to his lot, was such as to make his friends thankful that his life had, on the whole, been guided through ways of so profound a peace.

Greatly, indeed, have they erred who have imagined him as cold, or even as by nature tranquil. "What strange workings," writes one from Rydal Mount, when the poet was in his sixty-ninth year—"what strange workings are there in his great mind! How fearfully strong are all his feelings and affections! If his intellect had been less powerful they must have destroyed him long ago." Such, in fact, was the impression which he gave to those who knew him best throughout life. The look of premature age, which De Quincey insists on; the furrowed and rugged countenance, the brooding intensity of the eye, the bursts of anger at the report of evil doings, the lonely and violent roamings over the mountains —all told of a strong absorption and a smothered fire. His own description of himself, in his *Imitation of the Castle of Indolence*, unexpected as it is by the ordinary reader, carries for those who knew him the stamp of truth:

"Full many a time, upon a stormy night,
His voice came to us from the neighbouring height:
Oft did we see him driving full in view
At mid-day when the sun was shining bright;
What ill was on him, what he had to do,
A mighty wonder bred among our quiet crew.

Ah! piteous sight it was to see this Man
When he came back to us, a withered flower—
Or like a sinful creature, pale and wan.
Down would he sit; and without strength or power
Look at the common grass from hour to hour:
And oftentimes, how long I fear to say,
Where apple-trees in blossom made a bower,
Retired in that sunshiny shade he lay;
And, like a naked Indian, slept himself away.

Great wonder to our gentle tribe it was
Whenever from our valley he withdrew;
For happier soul no living creature has
Than he had, being here the long day through.

Some thought he was a lover, and did woo:
Some thought far worse of him, and judged him wrong:
But Verse was what he had been wedded to;
And his own mind did like a tempest strong
Come to him thus, and drove the weary wight along."

An excitement which vents itself in bodily exercise carries its own sedative with it. And in comparing Wordsworth's nature with that of other poets whose career has been less placid, we may say that he was perhaps not less excitable than they, but that it was his constant endeavour to avoid all excitement save that of the purely poetical kind; and that the outward circumstances of his life—his mediocrity of fortune, happy and early marriage, and absence of striking personal charm—made it easy for him to adhere to a method of life which was, in the truest sense of the term, *stoic*—stoic alike in its practical abstinences and in its calm and grave ideal. Purely poetic excitement, however, is hard to maintain at a high point; and the description quoted above of the voice which came through the stormy night should be followed by another—by the same candid and self-picturing hand—which represents the same habits in a quieter light.

"Nine-tenths of my verses," says the poet, in 1843, "have been murmured out in the open air. One day a stranger, having walked round the garden and grounds of Rydal Mount, asked of one of the female servants, who happened to be at the door, permission to see her master's study. 'This,' said she, leading him forward, 'is my master's library, where he keeps his books, but his study is out-of-doors.' After a long absence from home, it has more than once happened that some one of my cottage neighbours (not of the double-coach-house cottages) has said, 'Well, there he is! we are glad to hear him *booing* about again.'"

Wordsworth's health, steady and robust for the most part, indicated the same restrained excitability. While he was well able to resist fatigue, exposure to weather, &c., there were, in fact there things which his peculiar constitution made it difficult for him to do, and unfortunately those three things were reading, writing, and the composition of poetry. A frequently recurring inflammation of the eyes, caught originally from exposure to a cold wind when overheated by exercise, but always much aggravated by mental excitement, sometimes prevented his reading for months together. His symptoms when he attempted to hold the pen are thus described in a published letter to Sir George Beaumont (1803):

"I do not know from what cause it is, but during the last three years I have never had a pen in my hand for five minutes before my whole frame becomes a bundle of uneasiness; a perspiration starts out all over me, and my chest is oppressed in a manner which I cannot describe." While as to the labour of composition his sister says (September, 1800): "He writes with so much feeling and agitation that it brings on a sense of pain and internal weakness about his left side and stomach, which now often makes it im-

possible for him to write when he is, in mind and feelings, in such a state that he could do it without difficulty."

But turning to the brighter side of things—to the joys rather than the pains of the sensitive body and spirit—we find in Wordsworth's later years much of happiness on which to dwell. The memories which his name recalls are for the most part of thoughtful kindnesses, of simple-hearted joy in feeling himself at last appreciated, of tender sympathy with the young. Sometimes it is a recollection of some London drawing-room, where youth and beauty surrounded the rugged old man with an eager admiration which fell on no unwilling heart. Sometimes it is a story of some assemblage of young and old, rich and poor, from all the neighbouring houses and cottages, at Rydal Mount, to keep the aged poet's birthday with a simple feast and rustic play. Sometimes it is a report of some fireside gathering at Lancrigg or Foxhow, where the old man grew eloquent as he talked of Burns and Coleridge, of Homer and Virgil, of the true aim of poetry and the true happiness of man. Or we are told of some last excursion to well-loved scenes; of holly-trees planted by the poet's hands to stimulate nature's decoration on the craggy hill.

Such are the memories of those who best remember him. To those who were young children while his last years went by he seemed a kind of mystical embodiment of the lakes and mountains round him—a presence without which they would not be what they were. And now he is gone, and their untouched and early charm is going too.

"Heu, tua nobis
Pæne simul tecum solatia rapta, Menalca!

Rydal Mount, of which he had at one time feared to be deprived, was his to the end. He still paced the terrace-walks—but now the flat terrace oftener than the sloping one—whence the eye travels to lake and mountain across a tossing gulf of green. The doves that so long had been wont to answer with murmurs of their own to his "half-formed melodies" still hung in the trees above his pathway; and many who saw him there must have thought of the lines in which his favourite poet congratulates himself that he has not been exiled from his home.

"Calm as thy sacred streams thy years shall flow;
Groves which thy youth has known thine age shall know;
Here, as of old, Hyblæan bees shall twine
Their mazy murmur into dreams of thine—
Still from the hedge's willow-bloom shall come
Through summer silences a slumberous hum—
Still from the crag shall lingering winds prolong
The half-heard cadence of the woodman's song—
While evermore the doves, thy love and care,
Fill the tall elms with sighing in the air."

Yet words like these fail to give the solemnity of his last years

—the sense of grave retrospection, of humble self-judgment, of hopeful looking to the end. "It is indeed a deep satisfaction," he writes, near the close of life, "to hope and believe that my poetry will be, while it lasts, a help to the cause of virtue and truth, especially among the young. As for myself, it seems now of little moment how long I may be remembered. When a man pushes off in his little boat into the great seas of Infinity and Eternity, it surely signifies little how long he is kept in sight by watchers from the shore."

And again, to an intimate friend, "Worldly-minded I am not; on the contrary, my wish to benefit those within my humble sphere strengthens seemingly in exact proportion to my inability to realise those wishes. What I lament most is that the spirituality of my nature does not expand and rise the nearer I approach the grave, as yours does, and as it fares with my beloved partner."

The aged poet might feel the loss of some vividness of emotion, but his thoughts dwelt more and more constantly on the unseen world. One of the images which recurs oftenest to his friends is that of the old man as he would stand against the window of the dining-room at Rydal Mount and read the Psalms and Lessons for the day; of the tall bowed figure and the silvery hair; of the deep voice which always faltered when among the prayers he came to the words which give thanks for those "who have departed this life in Thy faith and fear."

There is no need to prolong the narration. As healthy infancy is the same for all, so the old age of all good men brings philosopher and peasant once more together, to meet with the same thoughts the inevitable hour. Whatever the well-fought fight may have been, rest is the same for all.

"Retirement then might hourly look
Upon a soothing scene;
Age steal to his allotted nook
Contented and serene;
With heart as calm as lakes that sleep,
In frosty moonlight glistening,
Or mountain torrents, where they creep
Along a channel smooth and deep,
To their own far-off murmurs listening."

What touch has given to these lines their impress of an unfathomable peace? For there speaks from them a tranquillity which seems to overcome our souls; which makes us feel in the midst of toil and passion that we are disquieting ourselves in vain; that we are travelling to a region where these things shall not be; that "so shall immoderate fear leave us, and inordinate love shall die."

Wordsworth's last days were absolutely tranquil. A cold caught on a Sunday afternoon walk brought on pleurisy. He lay for some weeks in a state of passive weakness; and at last Mrs. Wordsworth said to him, "William, you are going to Dora." "He made no reply at the time, and the words seemed to have passed un-

heeded; indeed, it was not certain that they had been even heard. More than twenty-four hours afterwards one of his nieces came into his room, and was drawing aside the curtain of his chamber, and then, as if awakening from a quiet sleep, he said, 'Is that Dora?"

On Tuesday, April 23, 1850, as his favourite cuckoo-clock struck the hour of noon, his spirit passed away. His body was buried, as he had wished, in Grasmere churchyard. Around him the dalesmen of Grasmere lie beneath the shade of sycamore and yew; and Rotha's murmur mourns the pausing of that "music sweeter than her own." And surely of him, if of any one, we may think as of a man who was so in accord with nature, so at one with the very soul of things, that there can be no mansion of the Universe which shall not be to him a home, no Governor who will not accept him among his servants, and satisfy him with love and peace.

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